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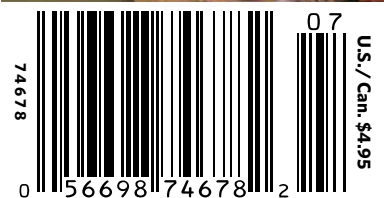
July 2017 | sojo.net

Faith in Action for Social Justice

There Goes the Neighborhood

Church planting, gentrification,
and the 'welfare of the city.'

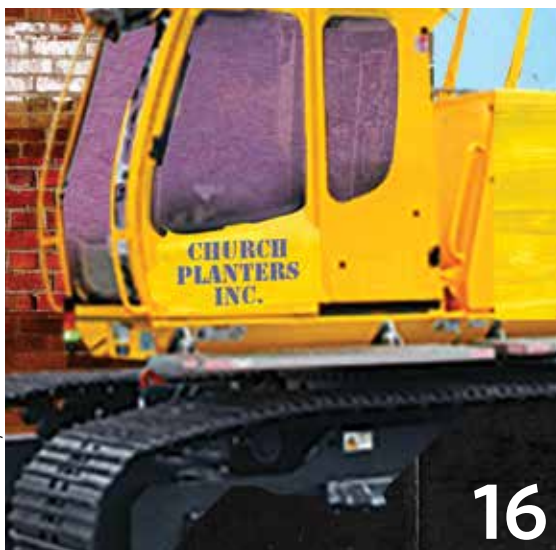
by D.L. Mayfield





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“SEEK THE WELFARE of the city.” In recent years, Jeremiah 29:7 has been the mantra of urban church planters. Yet, as D.L. Mayfield points out in our cover story, these mostly white, missional-minded Christians “talk a lot about moving in and contributing to the flourishing of a city, but say little on the negative disruption that these moves can make in the existing community.” Ask a church planter to share their theology of gentrification, says Mayfield, and you’ll likely get blank stares.

It’s a personal story for Mayfield. Despite her missionary training and experience living among the urban poor, Mayfield felt helpless when gentrification hit her

low-income neighborhood. “I can love my neighbors with my entire heart and soul, but what does that mean when every month more are driven away by increasing rents?” she writes. “How is our gospel good news for anyone but the gentrifiers themselves?”

And it’s a personal story for us, too. In 1975, the Sojourners community moved from Chicago to Columbia Heights, then one of the poorer neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. For the next three decades, we loved the neighborhood as best we could: We opened a daycare center, engaged in tenant organizing, and ran “freedom schools” with our low-income neighbors. And we tried to learn from those

who’d been there long before we showed up.

But when developers began eyeing the neighborhood in the early 2000s, we realized our good intentions couldn’t protect our most vulnerable neighbors. Our mere presence—a couple dozen mainly white, middle-class people—gave the appearance of a neighborhood already “safe” for those with higher incomes. Property values rose, Starbucks moved in, and long-term residents were pushed out.

Mayfield’s article is a challenge to Christians making new church homes in urban areas. As we know well, trying to walk humbly and do justice in the city is a long, often-difficult journey. ■

Letters

A Red Flag?

Regarding the Episcopal church called “The Cathedral of the Confederacy” (“Robert E. Lee Worshipped Here,” by Betsy Shirley, April 2017): Token efforts of repentance such as the removal of the Confederate flag will not suffice; full biblical repentance requires massive restitution in order to repair the enormous oppression and damage done to African-American people over the centuries.

Lowell Noble
Riceville, Iowa

Spoiler Alert

It’s always great to read about an entrepreneur who shows that justice can be good business (“Grocery Store Inequity,” by Courtney Hall Lee, April 2017). I was interested to read of Jeff Brown’s effort to introduce quality, convenient shopping to low-income areas of Philadelphia because I lived in the southwest Germantown part of that city for two years back in the mid-1980s. I quickly noticed, when visiting the suburbs, that perishable food was much more plentiful and varied and lasted longer than food I bought at the “supermarket” a mile away from my apartment. One can only suppose that low-income folk did not find expensive, quickly spoiled food appealing and, since they didn’t buy it, healthy, fresh food was harder and harder to get. People are too often blamed for their own poor health

American political discourse has featured a false dichotomy between capitalism and socialism.

habits. Please keep informing about the barriers faced in the name of “just business.”

Ann Larson
Essex, Vermont

Spivey’s Still Got It

Regarding “The Trump Presidency, One Year Later,” by Ed Spivey (April 2017): I laughed so many times that my wife wanted to read it! I think humor may be one of the best antidotes for the toxicity of our times. Spivey’s humor is also self-deprecating, which is more effective than the self-righteousness I feel and express so often. Thank you, Ed, for making us laugh while reminding us that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Charles R. Crawley
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Don’t Discount Adam Smith

Several points from your interview with Chuck Collins (“Wealth and the Common Good,” March 2017) illustrate the compatibility of his ideas with the economic system of capitalism proposed by Adam Smith. Smith sharply criticized stark economic inequalities. He advocated good

wages for workers, writing that efficiencies in the division of labor made it possible to spread wealth even to the lowest ranks of the people. He advocated progressive taxation. And he argued that people were the same—no “myths of deservedness” for Smith. Finally, while Smith did not say anything about campaign finance reform, his excoriating comments on the political power of the wealthy are potent. The clear inference is that the wealthy should not have disproportionate electoral power.

For too long, American political discourse has featured a false dichotomy between capitalism and socialism. This dichotomy has been based on a gross distortion of Smith’s system. It is time to change the conversation to what kind of capitalism would be best for the country and the world: the savage capitalism of recent decades, or the capitalism with justice and equal opportunity that Smith advocated. **John E. Hill**

Quincy, Massachusetts

“But what about ...?” Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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BY JIM WALLIS

Truth and Consequences



ELECTIONS HAVE consequences. It's a phrase we hear all the time, generally from whichever party won a recent election and is claiming a mandate to fulfill campaign promises.

Sometimes, for those observing Washington from the outside, the truth of this statement can get lost. People see partisan gridlock and say to themselves, "Nothing ever gets done in Washington. Both parties have all sorts of problems. Why should I even bother to vote?" Yet the truth is that all elections—local, state, national—matter. They all have consequences. And in 2017, we are seeing this play out in particularly dramatic and alarming ways.

There are countless examples, but I want to focus on the Department of Justice. While most

used some of his speeches in his first few months on the job to talk about the new "Trump era" and what that means for law enforcement. Many of us strongly opposed Sessions' nomination because of his long record of supporting racist policies, extreme anti-immigrant views, and uncritical support for law enforcement that put him well outside of even the Republican Party's mainstream.

In early May, Sessions again showed why he was a uniquely dangerous choice for attorney general. He issued guidance to federal prosecutors that requires them to pursue the toughest possible charges and sentences against crime suspects—even nonviolent drug offenders, who in 2013 Eric Holder had tried to partially shield from life-destroying mandatory minimum sentences. Sessions' decision will likely affect countless individuals and families forever, exacerbate our national mass incarceration crisis, greatly boost the private prison industry, and ultimately disenfranchise a great many people of color.

It's another pillar of Trump and Sessions' voter-suppression strategy, which also came into clear focus in May with an executive order forming an "election integrity" commission to be co-chaired by Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, a notorious voter-suppression warrior. This commission's transparent purpose is to provide cover for the myth that voter fraud is a serious and widespread problem—despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary—so that laws can be passed to make it more difficult for minorities to vote. Let me make clear what this is: the beginning of a coordinated strategy from Washington, led by the Trump administration, to deliberately and strategically deny the voting rights of people of color and other opponents of this administration.

The other danger of the Trump Justice Department is the politicization of the FBI. As the country's national police, the FBI has an almost-unrivalled power to destroy lives and reputations. In recognition of this, there are safeguards that are supposed to make it uniquely independent from political influence, compared to other agencies.

The firing of an FBI director is a very rare occurrence. When Bill Clinton fired William Sessions in 1993, the only other time this has happened, it was after an extensive internal investigation showed systematic ethics violations. Trump paid no regard to this precedent, firing Comey abruptly and in the most humiliating manner possible. It very clearly seems to have been done for political reasons, precisely because Comey was too independent and insufficiently loyal to Trump, and because he refused to end the investigation of Trump's connections to Russia. The dangers of having a Trump loyalist as the nation's top investigator are immense, and Trump's failure to respect legal norms to this point gives us no reason to believe he will do better going forward.

Under Trump, the dangers to civil liberty and free and fair elections should not be underestimated. For everyone who worries about drug policies that lead to racialized mass incarceration, for everyone who fears the myth of voter fraud being used to disenfranchise minorities, for every American who believes we are a nation ruled by laws and not by a ruler, and for every Christian who longs for a more just and equitable society, every day we see how painfully true it is that elections have consequences. ■

Sessions again showed why he was a uniquely dangerous choice for attorney general.

employees there are career civil servants who stay in their positions regardless of who is president, new presidents get to fill many of the top positions with political appointees. Presidents can pick whoever they want to fill these posts (some must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate), and they can be fired by the president at any time, for any reason. FBI directors serve 10-year terms to insulate them from political pressure, but as we saw in May with James Comey, they can also be fired by the president at any time.

The danger of the Trump Justice Department can clearly be seen in Jeff Sessions' tenure thus far as attorney general. Any notion that Sessions would show independence from the president is belied by the fact that he was one of Trump's earliest supporters and top surrogates, and he has

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.



Michael J. Sharp, a U.N. peacemaker who was killed in March, is shown visiting a camp for displaced people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Jana Asenbrennerova

By Sarah Thompson

Pray for the Dead, Fight for the Living

When Christian peacemaking requires the ultimate sacrifice.

MICHAEL J. SHARP was a close friend of mine. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), he was a Mennonite witness, scholar, and peacemaker. Over the course of five years, first as a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer and then through the United Nations, Sharp cultivated relationships of trust amid dreadful violence. His work in the DRC included demobilizing armed groups, investigating human rights abuses, and reporting to the U.N. Security Council on “creating the conditions for peace” in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

On March 12, Sharp and colleague Zaida Catalan were killed while on a U.N. fact-finding mission in Congo’s central Kasai region. Earlier, they had documented five mass graves in the region. Over the months, the number had risen to 23. The bodies of Sharp and Catalan were found on March 27. The four Congolese members of their travel team remain missing.

Eastern Mennonite University, where

Sharp attended as an undergrad, has an international program for peacemakers, with graduates such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gebowee. Many return to their home countries to face political violence, torture, and death.

How do Christian peacemakers engage the loss of friends and colleagues? We train

Grieving is also part of peacemaking.

and study as hard for peace as soldiers do for war, yet we do not have to “soldier on” when one of us falls. We do not have to appear “strong for the cause”; there is no national myth that forces us to choke back our tears. Christian Peacemaker Teams, where I serve as executive director, immediately gave me leave to grieve and gather with loved ones. My colleagues and friends sat with our devastation. We did not pretend that the world made sense or that

“God has everything under control.”

Mennonites and Anabaptists center Christ’s call to be peacemakers. We recognize the physical, emotional, and spiritual risk involved. The way of peace that Jesus models is filled with turmoil, as seen in his long night weeping in Gethsemane. Giving space to our grief can provide clarity and help with the recovery process. Christ rose from that devastated moment to stay true to his mis-

sion—even extending a healing touch to his captor’s ear (Luke 22:51).

The process of grieving is also part of peacemaking. A staggering number of tragedies cross our Facebook feed every day. We become desensitized. We decontextualize. But when someone you know personally suffers and dies, all the pain of all those numbers and situations rushes in. It pounds the body: searing, graphic, unrelenting.

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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Part of peacemaking is to let that pain in, to be made raw and sensitized by it. By having compassion for ourselves, by asking for help, an even deeper commitment can grow. Our circle of care widens. We open our heart and mind to the reality of the many people and places whose names we don't know, but whose lives matter just as much as the one we do know.

In Michael Sharp's case, it is too trite to see him simply as a "martyr for peace." He and his colleagues were searching for mass graves in the Kasai region and someone did not want them to complete that work. It is up to us to make sure his work continues.

The wider church can honor a

peacemaker like Sharp by not by putting him on a pedestal. Instead of distancing ourselves from the pain, let the loss enter us. Aware of our own complexity, we can embrace the complexity of the slain peacemaker's story. We can honor their work by learning where they served, why, and what local efforts continue. Grieving requires disrupting business as usual and examining how we have been conformed to the patterns of violence in the world. Connecting with grief, rather than "soldiering on," will reorder our priorities once we are moving again. ■

Sarah Thompson is executive director of Christian Peacemaker Teams.

By Jerry L. Van Marter

Time to End the Korean War

Diplomatic options with North Korea are limited—but the alternatives are unthinkable.

OF THE MORE than 60 countries I have visited as a journalist, North Korea is by far the strangest.

As part of a five-person delegation from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), I visited North Korea for one week in spring 2010 at the invitation of the Korean Christian Federation, the government-sanctioned

grew up in North Korea and still has family there, advised us to assume that we were being watched every minute and that every conversation was monitored. When his family visited in the hotel room we shared, he turned the television volume to full blast while they talked quietly beneath the roar.

Everyone we spoke with offered the same narrative: North Korea is a peace-loving nation surrounded by hostile forces seeking its demise. The chief culprits, in this narra-

tive, are South Korea and the United States.

A few things became clear: North Koreans' expressed faith in their leaders is unshakeable. Kim Il-Sung, a leader of the resistance to the Japanese occupation of Korea in the 1930s, founded North Korea's family dynasty in 1945, when Korea was divided at the end of World War II. North Koreans may not be literally "brainwashed," but they are certainly dependent on the dynastic family (and state apparatus) that leads them.

For North Koreans, the political and psychological reality is that their country is still at war with the United States. The Korean War ended with an armistice—a cease-fire—not a treaty. A treaty has never been negotiated, much less signed. As a result, North Koreans seem willing to make any

Very few countries have had nuclear weapons and then given them up.

Protestant denomination in North Korea.

From the moment we touched down in Pyongyang, we were "minded" 18 hours a day by two leaders of the KCF. We saw only what they wanted us to see and spoke only with those who were part of our official itinerary. North Koreans are forbidden to speak—or even make eye contact—with foreign visitors.

One morning before our minders showed up, I went for a short walk with another delegation member. I carried my camera and took a few photos. When we returned to the hotel, our minders were waiting for us in the lobby with several government officials. I was instructed to scroll through all my photos and was told which ones I could keep and which were to be erased on the spot.

One member of our delegation, who

From the Archives

July-August 1995

Where Was God?

IN SEMINARY

we “wrestled” with the problem of evil. Human evil. Systemic evil. The apparent evil of natural disasters. Drawing lines between the horrors wrought by an earthquake and the tragedy of an air crash caused by a mechanical failure. Tracing human culpability for the famine in Ethiopia. I wrote one dandy paper on the failure of process theology to deal adequately with the problem of evil. All at arm’s length, in the relative comfort of a “starving student’s” life.

It’s funny, in a way, that even though I already had worked for years with abused and neglected kids, their experience of evil rarely entered my college musings, at least not in any significant or sustained way. ... Guess what? This girl [an abuse survivor] doesn’t want my “problem of evil” package. Some do, you know. Some of the kids I’ve worked with will ask, “Where was God when I was being abused?” because they want desperately to hear that God was in the picture somewhere. Anywhere. ...

One thing is sure: I can’t “comfort” her into a faith in God. I can’t hope to find some new and dynamic arrow in the theological quiver that will penetrate the armor of her anger and disillusionment. I can’t hope to find some new stuff to put into those old packages. In fact, I have to fight every urge to tamper with my packages, and instead learn to leave them up on the shelf, where, for the most part, they belong. ■

Jamie Howison was pastoral care coordinator at Marymound Inc., a treatment resource for adolescents in Winnipeg, Manitoba, when this article appeared.



sacrifices and undergo any hardships for the sake of the state. In the 1990s, spending on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program barely skipped a beat, even as a famine wiped out perhaps 10 percent of the country’s population.

So, with tensions rising of late to an unprecedented level, even for this longtime conflict, what are the options? Very few, I’m afraid.

North Korea will never give up its nuclear weapons if other countries keep theirs, believing that nukes are the only deterrent to the overwhelming military power of the U.S. (The only countries that have given up nuclear weapons are three former Soviet republics and South Africa.) Efforts to persuade the Chinese to exert more pressure are of limited value. China sees North Korea as an essential buffer on the Korean peninsula. Ratcheting up

economic sanctions will squeeze, but not deter, the North Korean government—just ask Cuba. A pre-emptive U.S. military strike will almost surely lead to a war that experts say could cost 1 million lives, primarily in South Korea, and \$1 trillion in damage.

Nicholas Kristof wrote in *The New York Times* that “The only option left ... is to apply relentless pressure together with China, while pushing for a deal in which North Korea would verifiably freeze its nuclear and missile programs without actually giving up its nukes in exchange for sanctions relief.” Such an approach doesn’t solve the problem; it only postpones it. But the alternatives are unthinkable. ■

Jerry L. Van Marter is interim director of communications for the office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

By Joy Olson

Welcome Without Precondition

A Mennonite church joins the sanctuary movement—again—in the face of Trump’s actions against immigrants.

WHAT DOES “SANCTUARY” mean today? The church I attend in Hyattsville, Md., a close-in suburb of Washington, D.C., took up this question after the 2016 presidential election.

Hyattsville Mennonite Church had been a “sanctuary church” in the 1980s. Given the current increase in the legitimate fear of deportation in the migrant community, we considered renewing our commitment to offering sanctuary.

In the 1980s, sanctuary was offered in the context of people fleeing the violence and devastation of the wars in Central America. In those days, offering sanctuary meant offering physical protection to individuals by housing them in churches—but it was also a broadly political statement of opposition to the U.S. government support for the wars in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

Today the situation is different. The last comprehensive reform of U.S. immigration laws took place 30 years ago. Since then millions of undocumented people have established lives in the U.S. They’ve had families and raised their children here. But immigration laws have not kept pace, and

paths to regularize their immigration status have been increasingly blocked. For most, there simply is no path.

During the Obama administration, Congress was unable to pass comprehensive immigration reform. President Obama used the power of executive orders to deter deportation of some immigrants who came to the U.S. as children—the Dreamers. Under President Trump, even the Dreamers are now at risk.

Today, those needing protection from detention on immigration infractions and deportation are all around us. Mennonites are a community of faith committed to following Christ’s teachings to welcome all, without precondition, especially those who are downtrodden, forgotten, and despised—the weak, the hungry, the stranger in our midst (Matthew 25)—and to “act justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6).

“From the 16th to the 20th centuries,” we are reminded in our church statement, “Anabaptists and Mennonites fleeing religious persecution, wars, and economic oppression found safety and freedom in the

United States, Canada, Catherine the Great's Russia, Paraguay, Mexico, and other places. The experience of refugee status and transnational migrations is in our stories, songs, foodways, and Christian beliefs."

For Hyattsville Mennonite, offering sanctuary might mean housing undocumented persons, but that's not our central question. In 2013, our church became a "Safe Congregation" and promised that "each person in the midst of our church community should have the assurance that our church is a safe place, without fear or threat of vio-

Anabaptists fleeing persecution found safety in the United States.

lence." Now we ask what it means to be a safe church committed to building a safe community today.

In response, we are learning about the impact of changes in immigration laws on our neighbors. We've asked migrant organizations what they need; learned our rights and the rights of the undocumented; partnered with a neighboring church with a large migrant population; learned how to protect individuals subject to deportation; engaged with the city council as it considered declaring Hyattsville a sanctuary city (which it did in April); attended public protests; and contacted our members of Congress.

We've learned that children whose families are under threat of deportation are suffering from trauma. In response, we are working to connect counselors and social workers with children in need of help. At some point, we may accompany immigrants to appointments with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, but that's not yet a need where we live.

We have stepped out of our congregational bubble. We are becoming better neighbors by listening and learning about those around us. The actions we take as a sanctuary church will be defined by the needs of our community. We are living our faith and becoming better citizens. ■

Joy Olson is an expert on human rights and U.S. policy toward Latin America. She lives in Washington, D.C.

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What Theocracy Looks Like?

According to Margaret Atwood, the theocratic regime depicted in her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* critiques the abuse of power, not Christianity. "I don't consider these people to be Christians because they do not have at the core of their behavior and ideologies what I, in my feeble Canadian way, would consider to be the core of Christianity," Atwood told Sojourners' Layton Williams just before Hulu premiered the novel's 10-part adaptation, "and that would be not only love your neighbors but love your enemies."

Read the full interview at sojo.net/handmaid.

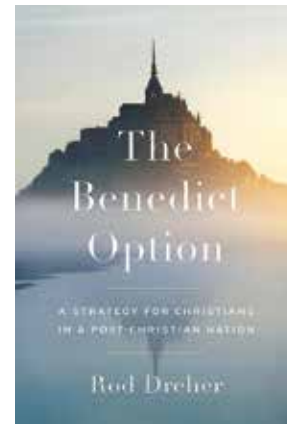
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“Science is a creaturely activity that can provide knowledge and produce skill, bringing us closer to God as it brings us closer to God's creation.”

—Avery Davis

on Christian support for scientific research
sojo.net/science

REVIEW



Culture War No More

The culture war is over and Christians lost, declares self-described “believing Christian and committed conservative” Rod Dreher in *The Benedict Option*, published earlier this spring. Consequently, he looks to the example of the Israelites in Babylonian captivity and advises U.S. Christians to retreat from mainstream culture and “embrace exile.”

Yet, according to David Congdon, Dreher misses the mark. “The overall message of the New Testament, especially the book of Acts, is that the church is not a separate community with its own culture,” writes Congdon. “The power of Christianity is found in what scholars of mission call its capacity for contextualization, which means that the message of Christ can be translated into different languages, cultures, and contexts.”

“Christians today who adopt an exilic identity have abandoned this dimension of Christianity. They are giving up on the contextualization principle. For them, contemporary American culture is enemy territory, and the only recourse is to retreat into a separate cultural community.”

“This does not mean, of course, that a church contextualized within the United States would uncritically affirm the culture,” continues Congdon. “But it does mean we need to consider more thoughtfully what exactly constitutes the truth of Christianity and how this truth might relate to its given context.”

To read more, visit sojo.net/exiles.

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Maina Kiai, founder of the Kenya Human Rights Commission



Rights Worth Defending

THIS SPRING I sat with former President Jimmy Carter and 150 others to talk about human rights.

Women and men from Pakistan, Iran, Israel, Palestine, DR Congo, Indonesia, South Africa, Mexico, Colombia, Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Russia, Ukraine, the U.S., and other nations attended the Carter Center's #FreedomfromFear Human Rights Defenders Forum in Atlanta in the midst of a year marked by increased attacks on human rights and on the people who defend them.

Yuri Dzhibladze, president of the Moscow-based Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, shared what he had

learned about authoritarian leaders by defending human rights in Putin's Russia. "For authoritarian leaders to take power," Dzhibladze said, "they must propagate the belief that *they* are the protectors of their countries. They must cast multiple actors as imminent threats."

Donald Trump's campaign declaration rang in my ears: "I alone can fix it," Trump said at the GOP national convention. Inside the Beltway those words sounded insane, but, according to Dzhibladze, Trump was simply reading from the authoritarian leaders' handbook 101. "In

authoritarian regimes," Dzhibladze said, "propaganda dehumanizes scapegoats. Meanwhile, devious enemies are always plotting against us." Flashbacks of Trump's opening campaign salvo haunted me: "When Mexico sends its people," he roared, "they're not sending their best ... They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists." And Trump drew from the authoritarian handbook when he attempted to subvert the FBI's investigation into connections with Russia.

FOUR DAYS OF rich communion with men and women who have suffered beatings, rapes, detention, and near death still could not dislodge me from my Facebook feed. A conversation was raging among some evangelical friends. One question prompted 75 responses in two days: "Is health care a product, or a right?" Some argued it is a product and a service. Surrounded by human rights defenders, I added, "It is a human right. It falls under the same category as the right to live."

The comments of a young black man on the thread demonstrated the dissonance created when Christian theology interweaves with conservative ideology: He wanted to believe health care was a right, but hesitated because he couldn't assent that government had a role to play.

In the back and forth, the god-like status of the market for U.S. evangelicals was illuminated.

At the Carter Center conference, Maina Kiai, former U.N. special rapporteur and founder of the Kenya Human Rights Commission, put it this way: The nearly 40-year hegemony of "market fundamentalism has created a situation where eight men own more than half the world." What is the core belief in this kind of a world? Money is God. It determines fates. The fate it chooses for individuals and groups is good, right, and just. Those who cannot survive in this world should not survive.

It is not a far step from the tyranny of money to the tyranny of despots. Perhaps that's how we got here.

What would it take for evangelicals—and all of us—to forsake this tyranny? I am convinced that we must discover God again. God's image does not dwell on dollar bills, nor in the boastful pronouncements of despots. God's image lives behind the eyes of all humanity, from the greatest to the least. There we will find inherent dignity and rights worth defending. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper is chief church engagement officer for Sojourners and author of The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right.



It is not a far step from the tyranny of money to the tyranny of despots.

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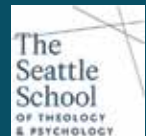
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LORD, GIVE US EYES TO SEE

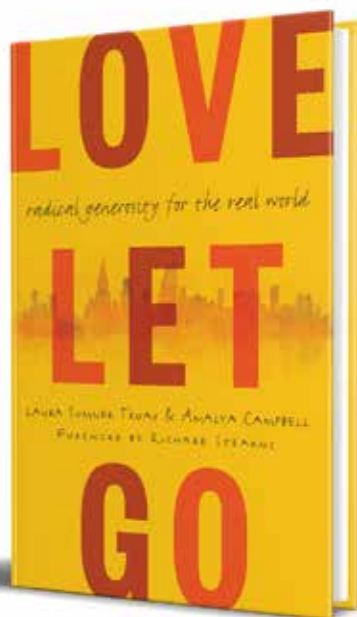


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Church Planting and Gentrification

Are we seeking the “welfare of the city,” or just our own?

by **D.L. MAYFIELD** • illustration by **DAVID HOLLENBACH**

LAST YEAR, STANDING at a microphone in front of our city council at a town-hall meeting, I came to a stark realization: I needed a theology of gentrification.

There I was, shakily demanding that the city not tear down our neighborhood’s one and only park to build a “revitalization” project complete with brew pubs and shared workspaces. I looked at the row of people seated at the city council table, frowning slightly at me, and worked up my courage, pretending I was channeling the tiniest bit of the pope.

“We have a moral responsibility to consider those who don’t have resources and how we can best serve them,” I said, my cheeks flushed. The architect talked about the need for income-generating elements, the secretary entered my remarks in the meeting record, and the developers changed none of their plans. As helplessness crept up into my heart, it became clear that I had no idea what I was doing and needed some instruction.

The irony was not lost on me. I had spent years studying how to do good and how to spread the good news. I got my degree in Bible and theology with a minor in intercultural studies; I volunteered with refugee resettlement agencies for more than a decade and joined a mission order among the urban poor for three years. I can quote the Bible and recite a theology of cultural engagement frontward and backward; I can wax poetic



I can love my neighbors with my entire heart and soul, but what does that mean when every month more are driven away by increasing rents?

about God's preferential option for the poor. And yet, in my 13th year of residing in a neighborhood mostly inhabited by people on the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum, I feel lost in the face of the most pressing realities confronting my neighbors.

Gentrification is at our doorstep, and I do not know what to do. I can love my neighbors with my entire heart and soul, but what does that mean when every month more are driven away by increasing rents? How is our gospel good news for anyone but the gentrifiers themselves?

White do-gooders and inadequate theology

I've come to realize that people like myself—white do-gooders, to be more precise—have not been taught adequate theology for our times. My neighbors do not care if you have a robust urban missiology. They would like secure, affordable housing and good schools for their children. They have practical, tangible needs that are altogether forgotten in a capitalistic, consumeristic society where those with plenty ignore the realities of others who would never buy a latte at the new corner coffee shop.

In the few spaces where the ideas of theology and urban renewal are brought together, something is missing. The overarching themes of American exceptionalism and triumphalism, tinged with colonialism, have made it nearly impossible to adequately engage with an economic and social reality as complex as gentrification.

I was taught to “go out and preach the good news.” People today who listen to prominent pastors such as John Piper and Tim Keller are being urged to move back into the city and become part of its transformation, with Jeremiah 29:4-7 as their guide, especially verse 7: “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” There is a flood of interest in urban churches in major metropolitan cities such as New York and San Francisco and my own town of Portland, Ore.

These theologies talk a lot about moving in and contributing to the flourishing of a city, but say little on the negative disruption that these moves can make in the existing community. For instance, in his large book on urban church planting, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, Keller has nearly 400 pages describing right doctrine and theology but only a few paragraphs about gentrification. Even more troubling is the lack of emphasis on the importance of learning from those Christians already at work in churches in the neighborhood (including people of color who've been there for decades). The unspoken assumption in the books, sermons, and conferences targeting missional-minded evangelicals is that the city—prior to white, hip church planters—is

a foreign mission field, pristine and untouched by the work of the Lord.

When gentrification is addressed in these spaces, it is often in unsatisfactory ways. In the few works published on urban missiology and gentrification, writers (many of whom are white and male) tend to err on the side of a benevolent fatalism about the entire phenomenon—yes, gentrification is like a slow train coming. It will happen, regardless of what we do. Therefore, love God and love people, and try not to feel too bad.

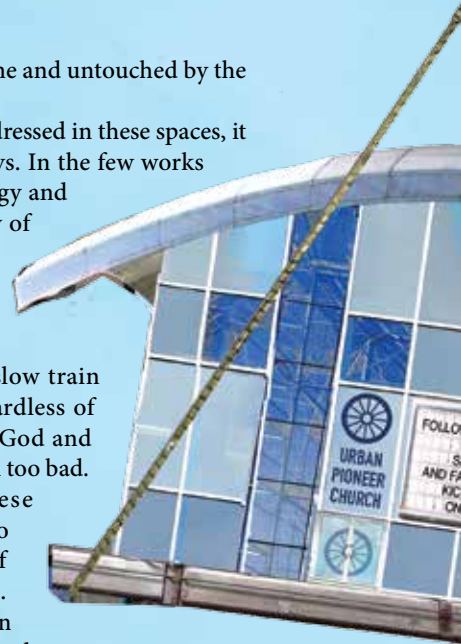
The problem with these approaches is that they fail to look critically at the history of race and church involvement. As Cole Brown, a white pastor in a historically black neighborhood in Portland, says in a *Humble Beast 101* video (“Trading Spaces”): “White evangelicals were not telling us to love and serve the city when it was predominantly occupied by lower-income minorities. We were fleeing from it. ... We didn't seek its peace and prosperity. We didn't pray for its good. White evangelicals started wanting to plant churches in the city and move to the city when? When the city started to become more white.”

Writer Nate J. Lee, responding to a video put out by Hillsong church to announce their intention to plant a church in San Francisco (including the phrases “God has great plans for this city” and “San Fran, the best is yet to come!”), wrote this: “Any kind of language that implies that God's work or God's plan *starts* when *we* arrive ... is indicative not only of terrible theology, but of white Christian exceptionalism, the oppressive belief that the correct kind salvation and healing can only be facilitated through *us*, on *our* terms with *our* methods—and *us* always happens to be white missionaries, white pastors, and white churches.”

The same critiques can be said of gentrification in general. The problem is not an influx of resources or more diversity (both of which can be very beneficial to everyone, including long-term residents). The problem is the belief that dominant culture is best—so that people move in and change a neighborhood to look just like the last one they left.

Church plants for whom?

In church planting circles, Portland (and the entire Pacific Northwest corridor) has become an increasingly desirable place to live. The aesthetics are pleasing, and due to a long history of discrimination and criminalization of African Americans, Portland itself has never had a large population of minorities. To drum up support for





church plants, many people focus on how “un-churched” the area is (I used to hear constantly about how there were more breweries and strip clubs per capita than churches). Conservative organizations such as the Southern Baptist Convention focus on the widespread acceptance of homosexuality, talking about how hard it is for families who “must” raise their children in this environment, and how there is only one SBC church for every 27,399 urban metro residents.

More people are being “called” to plant churches here, yet very few are being planted in the last few areas where true economic and racial diversity exist. I live on the very outskirts of the city, a neighborhood originally born out of “white flight.” Now, with the urban core being so desirable, it is the only place with affordable rents in the city. On the street corner across from our neighborhood’s single park are three large apartment complexes that together house one of the highest concentration of low-income families in the entire state of Oregon. But so far, Hillsong has not come knocking—even though a church within walking distance that provides services to families would be greatly appreciated and needed. Perhaps they will come when a brew pub opens in two years, when many of the residents are forced out of their apartments and test scores start to rise in the local schools. Maybe then God will tell them to plant a church out here.

If this sounds harsh, it is because we are in a dire moment. People are being exiled from their homes and communities while Christians attend conferences on church planting. We are centering the wrong people in these conversations, and we have misapplied scripture egregiously. As Cole Brown says, Jeremiah 29:4-7 was written originally to people in exile, to the *displaced*, not people with power who are moving into a space of their own volition. This seems more suited to be God’s message of love and care for those brutalized and uprooted by gentrification, not a theological command to go out and conquer a new space.

What we talk about when we talk about gentrifiers

I can’t be a gentrifier, because I am a “good” person. People involved in urban ministry often reflexively defend themselves. As social psychologist Christena Cleveland told me, “There is this aura of shame around gentrification that ... stifles the conversation so there is zero creativity for dealing with the issues.” This shame has many sources—our privilege being exposed, ambivalence about our social standings in comparison to our neighbors, guilt over being a part of an unjust and unequal society. For me, moving into low-income housing first opened my eyes to the very different realities in America. As I learned

about systemic oppression, racism, and the dehumanizing crush of capitalism, I was overwhelmed with guilt. First, because this was all new information to me. And second, I knew I had benefited from these systems that had so obviously harmed my neighbors.

Closely tied to feelings of guilt and shame around privilege is our relationship to money. “We don’t have a theology of money in the west,” Cleveland said. “These neighborhoods are gentrifying because they are attractive places to live. It’s consumerism.” Cleveland echoes scholars such as Walter Brueggemann, who point out that the Hebrew scriptures are obsessed with neighbor-love and constantly warning Israel against falling into

“White evangelicals were not telling us to love and serve the city when it was predominantly occupied by lower-income minorities.”

the norm of predatory economics that marked all the cultures around them.

To deal with our shame, white Christians must be willing to dive into relationships with those who are most at risk for displacement and seek to understand their suffering, if only on a peripheral level. Because the truth is, it is normal to feel bad about unequal access to housing, about the unchecked lust for profits by developers, or about how the wealth of our country was built upon the dehumanization of Native Americans and on the backs of slave labor. As Mark Charles, a theologian and activist, says, there is no house deed that is not rooted in the U.S. government selling out the original caretakers of this land.

I think about my own house, which I bought a few months ago. I had the good sense to feel uneasy, to wonder why I got a loan while others were denied, to think about the Indigenous tribes that originally lived here, to consider the white families in the 1950s who, fleeing diversity, settled here, hoping for an enclave of whiteness. The history is troubling from every angle.

And yet triumphalist, traditional evangelical theologies had taught me only to rejoice in my good fortune of a house, to praise God for the blessing, and to tell everyone that I planned to use it as a blessing for others. No one ever taught me that one person’s blessing can look and feel like another’s curse.

Perhaps more than anything else, we need to develop a theology of lament and co-suffering for gentrifying places. As David P. Leong writes in his book *Race and Place*, “compassionate lament ... lays the groundwork for solidarity, trust, and action.” He continues, “Only when we are truly present to our neighbors in a place, committed to authentic listening, and moving toward shared suffering can we enter



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into the seemingly strange and unfamiliar space of lament.” It is key to avoiding “inadvertent ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism.”

Calling out the inequalities in the world is of course biblical: The call to repent for communal sin, asking God to forgive us for neglecting and forgetting the poor, is found again and again in scripture. I have learned the importance of lament, of giving voice to all the systems that are wrong in my country, my state, my neighborhood, and my religion. I have learned the importance of asking for forgiveness, of repenting to move forward into repair.

But conversations around gentrification have also been too few or too superficial to be of practical use because there are no simple solutions, and each neighborhood and city is unique in both perils and assets. Combating gentrification is a long game, focused on grassroots and collaborative effort by the people who are the most at risk of displacement and, ideally, committed allies. It is not stopped by one person with good intentions, or 10.

But on the other side of self-interrogation, lament, and repentance, there is hope. I don't believe the ravages of gentrification are inevitable.

I went from being a starry-eyed do-gooder to a depressed bystander and am now somewhere in between—watchful, curious, and trying to pay attention to my neighborhood. I am trying to work toward true proximity, as Bryan Stevenson, an advocate for racial justice in the legal system, terms it. This happens when the people coming into a neighborhood get close enough to become burdened by injustice themselves. When that happens, Stevenson says, we will not feel free until everyone in our neighborhood is liberated. Until we see ourselves as the Babylonians, we will continue to conquer and displace the people who are beloved by God.

The city will be taking out our park in a few months, and I am not sure what will happen next. But I won't stop showing up, both to my neighbors' apartments and to city council meetings. I won't stop assessing my own role in gentrification. I won't stop lamenting the moral crisis of our times. I won't stop searching for signs of resurrection and renewal that start from the smallest of seeds. ■

*D.L. Mayfield lives in Portland, Ore., with her husband and two small children. She is the author of *Assimilate or Go Home: Notes from a Failed Missionary on Rediscovering Faith* (HarperOne).*

Can Civil Religion Save Us?

IN HIS RECENT book *American Covenant*, Philip Gorski writes, “To be part of a tradition is to know certain stories, read certain books, admire certain people, and care about certain things. It is to knowingly enter into an ongoing conversation, a conversation that precedes one’s birth and continues on after one’s death.”

The civil religious tradition was first invoked regarding the United States by sociologist Robert Bellah in 1967. Bellah spoke of it as the “religious dimension” of the “political realm” and the “founding myth” of our national community. It stands separate from people’s traditional faiths but draws freely from religious language to sacralize national symbols.

Gorski is quick to point out that civil religion is neither religious nationalism nor radical secularism. The first is the odious manipulation



occur on the ground—in demographics, in attitudes, in events—and then we discover that our civil religion narrative no longer connects our past with our present and our hoped-for future in a satisfactory way. So we listen to new voices, we add some symbols and deemphasize others, elevate these stories and demote those, and reinterpret the whole narrative so that we continue being America, or rather, become a better America.

This whole process serves poetic purposes, but it serves practical ones as well. In his landmark study of American diversity, *E Pluribus Unum*, Harvard social scientist Robert Putnam, generally liberal in his political leanings, discovered that “people living in ethnically diverse settings appear to ‘hunker down’—that is, to pull in like a turtle.” In other words, as diversity increased, the qualities that typically characterize strong community decreased. The higher the diversity, the more people distrusted their neighbors, and the less they volunteered and gave to charity.

While the inverse correlation between diversity and community in the study cannot be denied, Putnam points out that it need not be inevitable either. One key, in his view, to putting increased diversity and strengthened community on the same path is to shape a national narrative that creates what

his Harvard colleague Diana Eck calls “a wider sense of we.”

Whatever our current challenges might be, it is a good bit easier to engage in this process in the U.S. than in, say, France, Germany, or Spain. As racist and xenophobic as our past (and, some would say, our present) might be, we were not conceived as an ethno-state in the manner of most European nations. There is no ethnicity called American in the way that French, Spanish, and German are ethnicities, with associated ways of being, believing, and belonging. We can reasonably point to our founding documents, from the Flushing Remonstrance to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and say, “See, this is a nation for all people.”

Gorski claims that the religious dimensions of American civil religion are drawn from the Judeo-Christian tradition, specifically the Old and New Testaments. Only those texts? If religious language and symbols play a key role in American civil religion, and if America is getting more religiously diverse, then the obvious question is, how will other sacred texts and religious vocabularies be incorporated into our evolving civil religion? ■



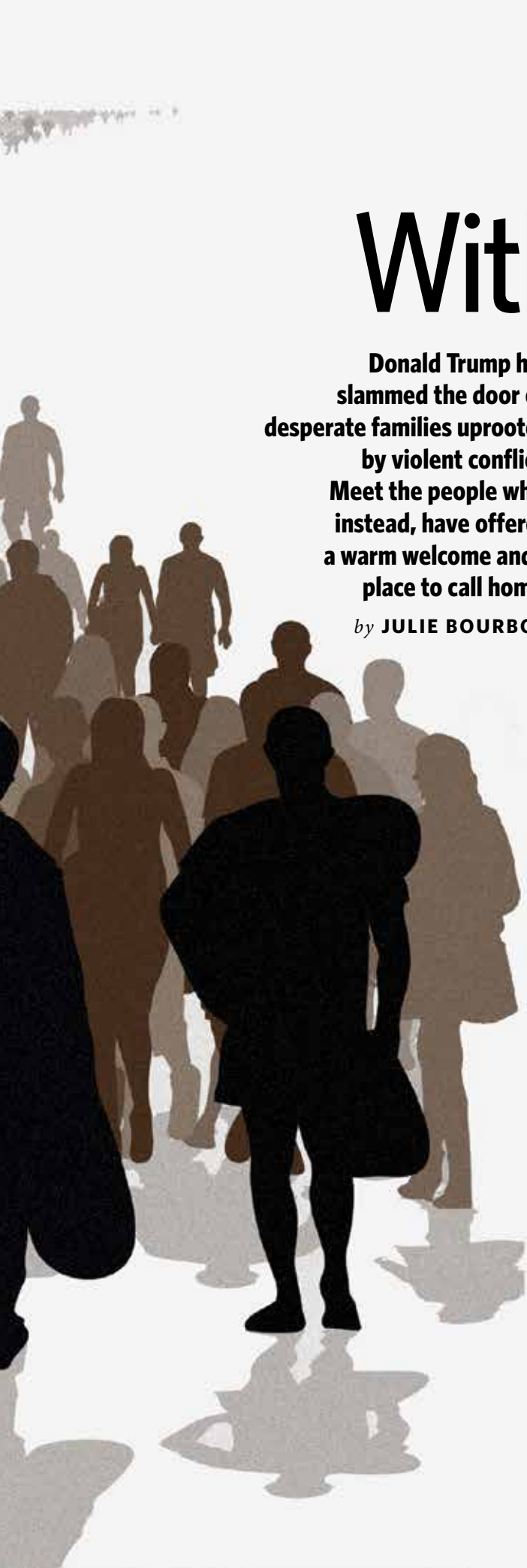
Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American.

There is no ethnicity called American in the way that French, Spanish, and German are ethnicities.

by one religious group of national symbols and political instruments to dominate others. The second requires a muzzling of the inspirations and expressions of too many Americans, and would leave out much of our most admired figures and most cherished history. “Imagine Lincoln’s or King’s or Obama’s speeches shorn of all religious references,” Gorski says. “Civic poetry would be transformed into political doggerel.”

At its best, civil religion creates what Justice Felix Frankfurter referred to as “cohesive sentiment” in a diverse nation. But it is a participatory and dynamic process. It is not as if the narrative exists in heaven somewhere and drops bridges of cooperation into diverse neighborhoods and schools. Rather, changes





With Open Arms

Donald Trump has slammed the door on desperate families uprooted by violent conflict. Meet the people who, instead, have offered a warm welcome and a place to call home.

by JULIE BOURBON

Lancaster, Pa., isn't exactly a big city, but with a population of about 60,000, it's also not the sort of place where you'd expect to bump into people you know at every intersection. Neither would you expect those people to be from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cuba, Ukraine, or Syria.

But if you're Christine Baer, congregational resource developer for Church World Service, such encounters are all in a day's work, and they usually result in an invitation to someone's home for dinner.

CWS is the relief, development, and refugee assistance arm of the National Council of the Churches of Christ. It relies on volunteers in the community to help newly arrived refugees restart their lives in the United States.

Congregations make up the family welcome teams, a vital part of the resettlement process. But about 10 years ago, congregational co-sponsorship of refugees resettled in the Lancaster area began to decline, and as recently as three years ago, only five congregations were sponsoring families. Baer attributes the drop to a difference in the way people practice church and community today and to people's lives being busier and faster, with less time to commit to volunteer work.

Since Baer's position was created nearly three years ago, CWS has worked to get those numbers back up. Nearly half of the families that arrived in the area last year, more than 400 individuals, were assigned to welcome teams. The teams ranged from families to large congregations and include Muslims, Mennonites, and Quakers. The experience is bringing faith groups together in a new way, Baer says. One welcome team is even taking Arabic lessons.

Baer speaks passionately about the warmth and generosity of the resettled people she works with: "I just want everybody to meet a family, to be able to talk to their neighbors and say, 'Can you tell me a little bit about your story?' or be willing to sit down for coffee or tea or dinner, because I tell you, I have not met a former refugee family that has

not been willing to feed me or welcome me for juice or tea or coffee. I want the politicians to sit down for a meal."

Raised in the Mennonite church, with a degree in peace building and development, Baer attributes her commitment to this work to that foundation. "When we hear

about overwhelming issues and events in the world, big-picture news stories, phenomena, and disasters," she says, "it's difficult to see yourself playing a role toward peace and being a peacemaker in that moment. But when I'm working one-on-one with the families, that is where I know I can make a difference."

There are currently more than 22 million refugees worldwide; fewer than 1 percent will ever be resettled.



The big picture

For the people Baer works with, the resettlement process begins years before they've ever heard of Lancaster, when they are forced from their homes and register as refugees with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Not everyone chooses to register. Many fear being on a list or being sent to a camp where they will be a religious minority. Those who do not register are ineligible for resettlement.

Once registered, refugees essentially put their lives in the hands of the UNHCR, which decides in what country they will be resettled; the refugees themselves have no say in the matter. Those referred by UNHCR to the United States are processed through resettlement support centers run by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, which screens applicants with the help of the Department of Homeland Security and multiple other U.S. government security agencies. It should be noted that these agencies rigorously—exhaustively—vet all refugees referred by the UNHCR, which resettles only the most vulnerable cases, those who can neither return to their home country nor safely live in a

"I have not met a former refugee family that has not been willing to feed me or welcome me for juice or coffee. I want the politicians to sit down for a meal."

neighboring country (female-headed families, religious minorities, the sick, and the disabled, for example). The screening process, which occurs while the refugee is still abroad—often but not always in a refugee camp—can take more than two years.

Those who pass the vetting process are subsequently assigned to one of nine non-governmental resettlement agencies, which include Church World Service, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, World Relief, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, among others; six are faith-based, three are not. Those groups often work with churches and interfaith groups to help the refugees acclimate.

The U.S. admits approximately two-thirds of all refugee resettlement referrals worldwide each year, and has historically been a generous and open-armed global citizen. But a revised executive order issued March 6 by President Trump, and currently blocked by federal judges in Hawaii and Maryland, would cut refugee admittance by more than half (to 50,000), halting it completely for 120 days. A 120-day halt can send a refugee family that has begun the process of receiving security and medical approvals (which have expiration dates) to the end of the line, only to begin the process all over again, a potentially devastating setback.

The United States accepted 84,995 refugees in 2016; the existing refugee acceptance cap for 2017—as determined last fall by President Obama, a power granted the president under the Immigration and Nationality

Act—is 110,000. To put that number in context, there are currently more than 22 million refugees worldwide; 86 percent of them are hosted by developing-world countries; fewer than 1 percent will ever be resettled. The average length of displacement is 17 years. All of which is to say that those who make it to our shores after being forced to leave their homelands, possibly for the rest of their lives, are among the luckiest—and most scrutinized—refugees in the world.

Maryland's interfaith effort

Once refugees land in the United States, they are eligible to receive resettlement services and the help of a caseworker for 90 days through the Refugee Admissions Program (some services are available for longer). During that time, the assigned case worker must ensure that they have gotten Social Security cards and housing, that the children are enrolled in school, and that the adults are taking English language classes. Each member of the household receives a total of \$925 to cover general living expenses, including housing costs. In addition, all admitted refugees must ultimately repay their travel expenses to the U.S.

This is where communities of faith often come in, playing an invaluable role in the resettlement process. They can provide the long-term accompaniment—as well as warmth, compassion, and patience, among other things—that a government bureaucracy could never supply.

In Prince George's County, Md., refugee families have been set up in several nondescript apartment complexes not far from FedEx Field, where Washington's NFL team plays. Those families are assisted by multiple groups, including the Montgomery County Interfaith Refugee Resettlement Neighbors (MCIRRN), which was founded in fall 2015, partly in response to a request by Maryland's governor, Larry Hogan, that then-President Obama not settle Syrian refugees in the state. (Hogan was one of 30 governors, most of them Republicans, to make such a request, which was not granted.)

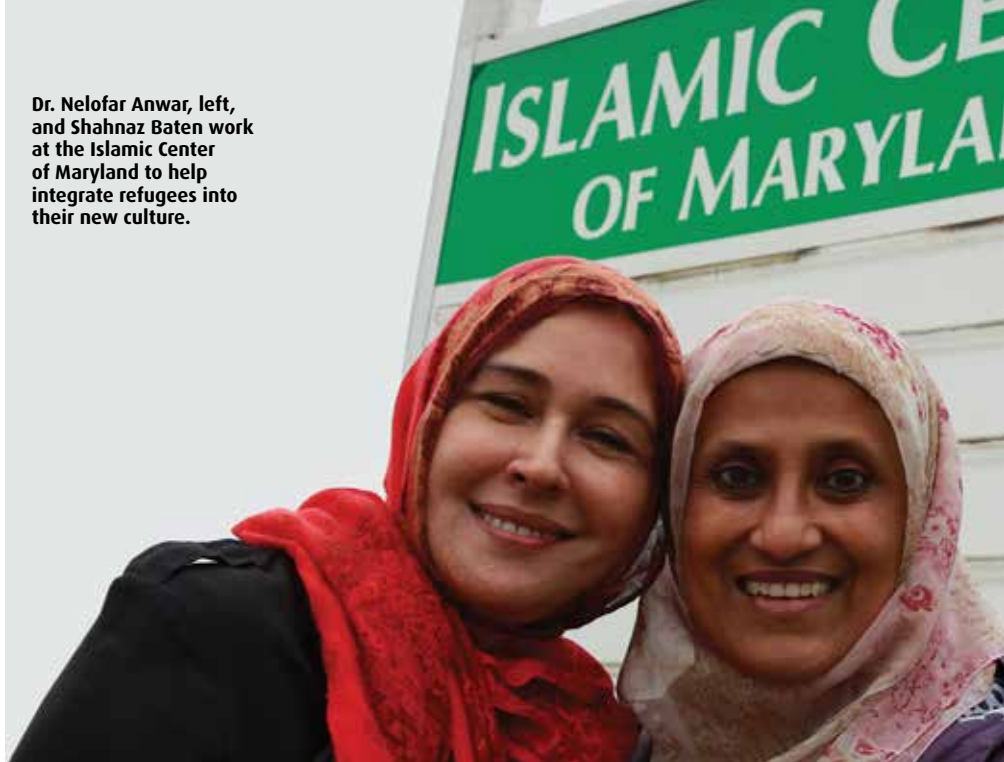
As anti-immigrant sentiment swept parts of the country, the Islamic Center of Maryland, located outside Washington, D.C., found itself becoming a hub for faith communities that felt morally compelled to respond to the ongoing refugee crisis. Today,



Christine Baer of Church World Service settles the Agwa family into their new home in Lancaster, Pa. The family spent years in refugee camps in Kenya after fleeing violence in western Ethiopia.

Craig Ruttle

Dr. Nelofar Anwar, left, and Shahnaz Baten work at the Islamic Center of Maryland to help integrate refugees into their new culture.



at least 13 Muslim groups, seven Christian churches, and two synagogues are members of this Maryland interfaith effort.

“We knew the numbers [of refugees] would be so high. How could we do it alone?” says Shahnaz Baten, a case manager at the Islamic Center. “We couldn’t. So why not invite everyone we know?”

Baten, co-founder of the Montgomery County Neighbors project, is an elegant, dynamic force in a headscarf. An immigrant herself—she came to this country from Bangladesh at age 10—she leads the MCIRRN meetings and does check-in visits with the families they support, most of which were referred through the Ethiopian Community Development Council, one of the nine official resettlement agencies, based in Arlington, Va. This, she says, is her calling.

“[God] has chosen this work for me and I am blessed with this work,” she says. “How can I turn down this work when so many lives are struggling?”

Each MCIRRN family is assigned an interfaith team (ideally made up of congregants from one church, one synagogue, and one mosque) that provides assistance—rent, grocery cards, food packets, English tutoring, and social support. As families become more self-sufficient, they receive less assistance and the group takes on new families in their place, for a total of about 14 at any given time.

Nelofar Anwar is another Islamic Center member. A physician by training, she cares for her children and her mother at home while volunteering with MCIRRN and the center’s other community programs, which include making dinner for the homeless and providing weekend snack packs for children who receive free and reduced-price lunches at school.

Through MCIRRN, Anwar has been working with two Hindu families from Sri Lanka and a Muslim family from Iraq. “Because it’s an interfaith effort, we want to reach out to different faiths,” she says, adding that the exposure to other congregations has been a blessing. “I think that’s probably the silver lining in the new administration. It has kind of pushed people to come together, people of different backgrounds.”

Another MCIRRN member, Merritt Groeschel, studied international development and worships at D.C.’s Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church. Her congregation

was already working with a refugee family through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, as well as with several other families in more informal relationships, when they joined the Montgomery County network. The church’s library has become a gathering spot for members of diverse faith communities to discuss the logistics of tutoring immigrant children, job opportunities for the parents, and plans to bring everyone together for an afternoon picnic.

The refugees have had varying experiences, Groeschel says, and the communities in the different apartment complexes are

job experience in their home countries. It’s a delicate balance, she says, and the church groups are learning as they go about when to offer help and when to step back and let the families figure things out for themselves.

From refugee to citizen

Back in Lancaster, one of Baer’s colleagues at Church World Service is Omar Mohamed, 29, who was first resettled in Tucson, Ariz., in 2009 from his native Somalia. He came via the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, which has more than 250,000 residents, making it the largest

in the world, a dubious distinction. He and his disabled younger brother, who was resettled with him, lived in Dadaab

with their parents for more than 15 years. They have not seen their mother since leaving the camp.

“That’s where I grew up and that’s where I went to school,” says Mohamed, a U.S. citizen since 2014. “But life was very difficult.” An internship at Lutheran Social Services while an undergrad at the University of Arizona led him to the job with CWS.

“I was always interested in working with refugees because I was a refugee myself,” he says.

Now Mohamed walks beside recent arrivals as they adjust to life in the Lancaster area. He does everything from picking them up at the airport to going with them to the Social Security office to teaching them how to use the stove. He recently witnessed the reunion of a Somali mother with her two daughters, ages 12 and 14, from whom she had been

In February, World Relief laid off 140 staff and closed five offices in the U.S.

evolving in unexpected ways. One has seen the emergence of a few dynamic leaders, and the families—from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq—are networking on jobs and language classes while their children regularly play together in the courtyard. The Syrian families in another complex seem to be struggling more socially and with finding suitable jobs for the fathers.

“No family is like a snapshot of all the other families,” she says, and all are having some trouble adjusting to a completely new culture.

Groeschel is concerned that with so many church and volunteer groups giving aid, no one is tracking the overall picture for each family. She worries that the financial assistance might make working-age adults less likely to take entry-level jobs for which they are sometimes over-qualified based on their

Rick Reinhard

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separated for seven years. It turns out that Mohamed's mother, a midwife, delivered both girls in the camp.

"A miracle," he calls it. Mohamed and his brother were scheduled to travel to Kenya in May for a three-month visit with their mother, taking with them Mohamed's two oldest children, 5 and 6. He worried about whether they would have trouble re-entering the United States, but assured his friends and family it would not be a problem. "I'm a citizen," he says, "like any other person."

Losing ground

The confusion caused by the president's executive order has affected not just the refugees but the official resettlement agencies that receive them. Kirt Lewis, director of the Sacramento field office of World Relief, says his agency was one of the first to announce it was laying off staff. In February, the agency released 140 staff and closed five offices, in Florida, Idaho, Maryland, Ohio, and Tennessee. Both Catholic Charities and the International Rescue Committee have been trying to raise emergency funds to keep field offices open.

Lewis expects other agencies will follow suit, letting go of hundreds of workers as the reality of accepting perhaps 60,000 fewer refugees this year than last begins to hit home and agencies suddenly find themselves overstaffed.

If the executive order is allowed to go forward, he wonders, "How many years of passion and expertise in helping refugees resettle and rebuild their lives here, how much of that is going to be lost?" On top of that is the effect on the congregations and volunteers who sign on to accompany the new arrivals once they land. "I think it's really starting to sink in to some of our partner churches that have really been transformed. They love refugees."

A former pastor and Iraq war veteran, Lewis is frustrated but thoughtful. "It's heartbreaking, because these folks have come to know and understand refugees for who we know them to be," he says of the volunteers. "These [refugees] don't represent the threat. They represent wonderful people, courageous people, people with tremendous gifts and talents who make our communities stronger. They enrich our communities. Those volunteers and pastors have expressed a lot of sadness over realizing they're not going to get the opportunity to help those people." ■

Julie Bourbon is a freelance writer and editor in Washington, D.C.

A Dangerous Charade

WHEN WATCHING a creative imagining of what feels like your own demise, the last thing you want is for an audience to cheer. But for white women watching *Get Out*, the record-breaking horror flick from comedy writer Jordan Peele, that's more or less what happened. It was a revealing moment, to say the least.

Get Out follows black photojournalist Chris, whose white girlfriend Rose invites him home for a weekend. To his terror, Chris slowly realizes that her nice, white, liberal family is masking a deep, violent racism. ("I would have voted for Obama for a third term" is a catchphrase played first as proof of the family's "colorblindness" and later revealed to be a cover for their fetishization of black bodies.) Rose—a seemingly "woke" white woman, who yells at cops for unfairly profiling her black boyfriend—is, without giving too much away, a less-than-ideal ally.

The film was released one month after Trump's inauguration, and it was easy to cheer for Chris as he took ownership of his fate and sought vengeance on his captors. In the last year, we'd seen unabashed patriarchal white supremacy pull-



Daniel Kaluuya as Chris in *Get Out*, with co-star Allison Williams as Rose.

identity and justice, inside and outside the church: Let us now give our money to the telling of truth.

To be a white woman in America is to be precariously power-adjacent: Because of our skin, we carry unquestioned privilege in power systems. Because of our gender, that security has a shelf life—we are included only as long as we are able or willing to perform according to those who control the levers.

It's a dangerous charade, one so deeply internalized it often goes unexamined. Our history indicates that when white women want agency, we often go to white men—even when they are the source of our exclusion, or even if we have to sell out others along the way. In the wake of the 15th Amendment granting black men the right to vote, suffragists including Carrie Chapman Catt, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Laura Clay made their case for the white woman vote by appealing to white supremacy. In January, a new book revealed that Carolyn Bryant, the white woman who accused Emmett Till of touching her in 1955, had lied.

Director Peele sketched

the character of Rose in early 2016, with an assumption the film would play to audiences under President Hillary Clinton. And had Clinton won, after a long and ugly election, I'm not sure I would have bothered to see a film with a blistering indictment of polite progressive racism. I would have thought, "But a liberal woman who says nice things about dismantling racism is president—can we just celebrate that?"

See how easy it is?

White women in America face a deficit of trust uniquely of our own making. As we continue to learn and confront our own histories of white supremacy, consider watching *Get Out* and paying attention to the comeuppance you assume is coming for Rose. Listen to your own response to Chris and Rose's final confrontation. Consider what it says about your own relationship with whiteness.

There is liberation in allowing ourselves to look directly for the first time at our own complicity. ■

Catherine Woodiwiss is senior associate web editor at Sojourners.



To be a white woman in America is to be precariously power-adjacent.

ing the levers in our politics and our churches. But then 52 percent of white women—many of them white Christian women—voted for Trump, and the role of white women in building and perpetuating damaging policies, narratives, and theologies was made more clear. Frankly, for me, and other white women who raced to see the film, *Get Out* felt like a chance to atone. White women have often skated by in the larger battles over



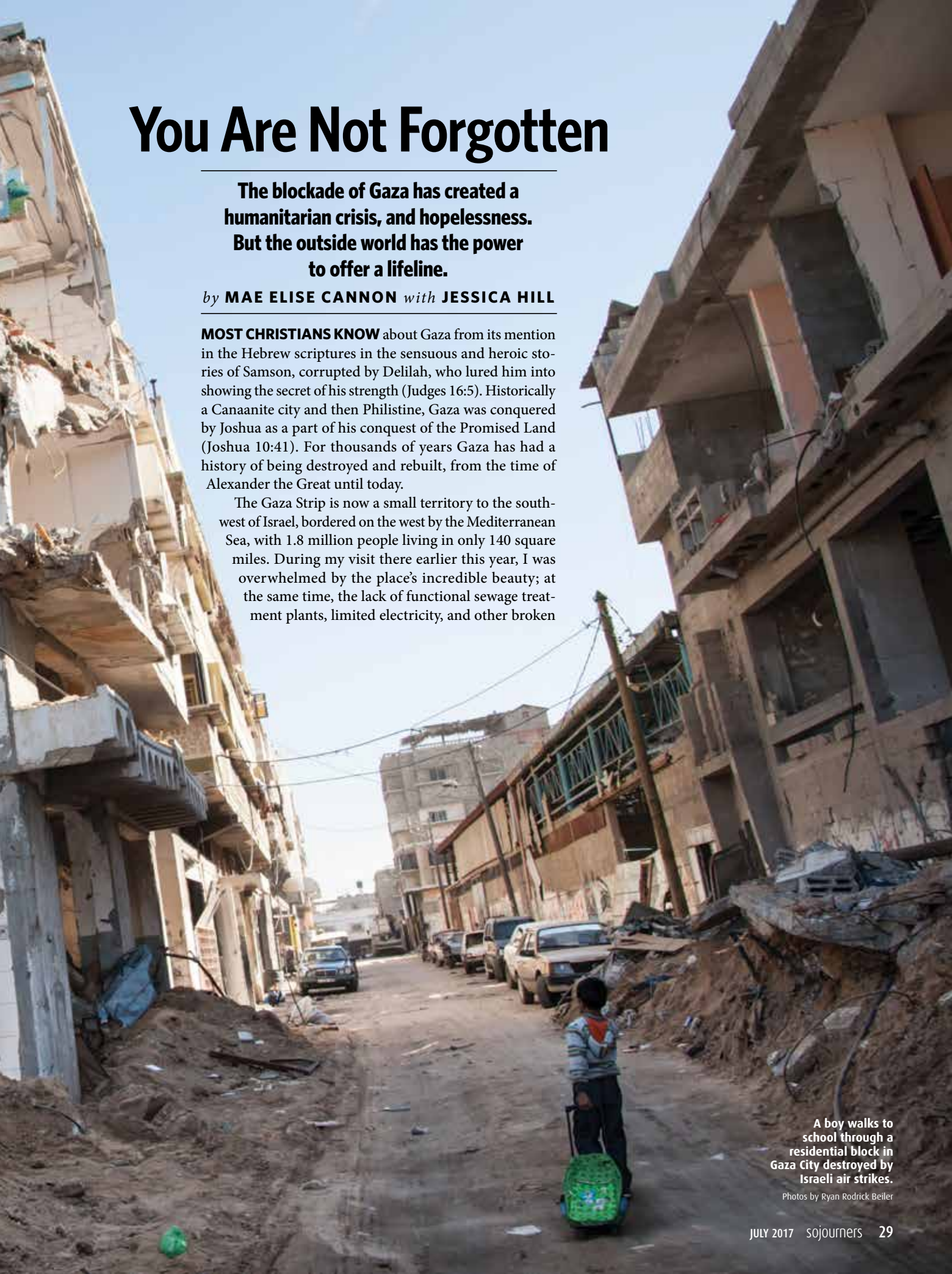
You Are Not Forgotten

The blockade of Gaza has created a humanitarian crisis, and hopelessness. But the outside world has the power to offer a lifeline.

by **MAE ELISE CANNON** with **JESSICA HILL**

MOST CHRISTIANS KNOW about Gaza from its mention in the Hebrew scriptures in the sensuous and heroic stories of Samson, corrupted by Delilah, who lured him into showing the secret of his strength (Judges 16:5). Historically a Canaanite city and then Philistine, Gaza was conquered by Joshua as a part of his conquest of the Promised Land (Joshua 10:41). For thousands of years Gaza has had a history of being destroyed and rebuilt, from the time of Alexander the Great until today.

The Gaza Strip is now a small territory to the southwest of Israel, bordered on the west by the Mediterranean Sea, with 1.8 million people living in only 140 square miles. During my visit there earlier this year, I was overwhelmed by the place's incredible beauty; at the same time, the lack of functional sewage treatment plants, limited electricity, and other broken

A photograph of a boy walking through a destroyed residential block in Gaza City. The boy is seen from behind, wearing a light blue and white striped shirt and dark pants, carrying a green backpack. He is walking down a dirt road lined with heavily damaged, multi-story concrete buildings. Debris and rubble are piled up on the sides of the road. In the background, several cars are parked along the street, and the sky is clear and blue.

A boy walks to school through a residential block in Gaza City destroyed by Israeli air strikes.

Photos by Ryan Rodrick Beiler



infrastructure result in Gazans experiencing a severe humanitarian crisis. Beautiful and tragic.

In 1967, the Israeli military seized Gaza and remained there until 2005, when Israel unilaterally pulled out under Ariel Sharon's "disengagement" plan. Between August and September 2005, roughly 9,000 Israeli settlers were evacuated and 21 settlements destroyed (rather than turned over to Gazans). In 2007, after Hamas took control of Gaza, Israel intensified the restriction of movement and imposed land, sea, and air blockades on the territory. The blockades have led to severe living conditions for the people there and a growing humanitarian crisis.

In the past decade, the people of Gaza have experienced three wars—in 2008, 2012, and 2014—between militant groups in Gaza, including Hamas, and the Israeli Defense Forces. Children in Gaza pay the greatest price, with these explosions of violence leading to post-traumatic stress, limited access to basic humanitarian needs such as potable water and electricity, and unstable civic infrastructure.

A severe humanitarian crisis

THE VIOLENCE surrounding Gaza did not end with the 2014 war; even in my brief, two-day visit, I experienced the ground shaking in Khan Yunis, a southern city in Gaza. My hosts assured me that we were safe, because the bombing was several miles away, over the Egyptian border. They said the Egyptian military was bombing ISIS targets in the Sinai.

That evening, I woke from a deep sleep when I heard what sounded like a bomb go off in the distance. Immediately I received a text message from my hosts telling me that the bomb-like sound was simply a "sonic boom" caused by an Israeli military jet breaking the sound barrier. For Gazans, the fly-bys happen much less frequently than in past years, yet the volume of the shock waves reminds men, women, and children that war is always on the horizon.

In addition to these traumatizing realities, years of socioeconomic decline, conflict, and blockades have contributed to the severe humanitarian crisis Gazans face. Electricity, water supply, health, and communications are just a few of the areas in which Gazans' daily lives have been affected.

Israeli attacks in 2014 significantly damaged the main power plant in Gaza. Access to consistent electricity, already limited, was worsened by a financial conflict between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, which led to difficulty in purchasing diesel fuel. The only remaining reservoir has a mere three-day supply of fuel, according to the Israeli human rights organization

"I wonder if I am doing enough to ensure a future for my children."

GISHA; as a result, Gazans at times have little or no electricity for up to 21 hours a day.

Bill Corcoran, CEO and president of American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), explains that fuel shortage is one of the key issues affecting Gazans. Access to electricity is never dependable—it could come on at two in the morning or two in the afternoon, and each time there is no guarantee how long it will last. The inconsistencies disrupt normal life, forcing families to wake up and try to

fit in everything that needs to be done before the electricity goes out. For the average family, this is one of the biggest burdens.

In addition, sporadic electricity prevents the regular operation of water pumps and wells, threatening access to clean water, and sewage treatment plants cannot operate regularly, according to a January report from B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, titled "Israel Cannot Shirk its Responsibility for Gaza's Electricity Crisis." Tens of thousands of gallons of partially treated sewage are being dumped into the Mediterranean Sea because of decreased treatment cycles. The untreated sewage water has devastating effects on the residential water supply. Some of the water pumped through the pipes is so contaminated it can burn skin. In fact, according to the Israeli organization GISHA, 96 percent of water from the coastal aquifer is not suitable for drinking or cooking because of excessive levels of chlorides, nitrates, and other contaminants. Gazans must spend significant financial resources to purchase bottled water.

These unsanitary conditions can produce dangerous medical conditions including diarrhea, cholera, dysentery, typhoid, and polio. According to ANERA, a children's hospital recently closed due to limited financial resources and access to fuel. Several of the main hospitals do not have adequate access to electricity because of fuel shortages and depend on generators to meet their needs. With such unstable electricity, hospitals can't put children on incubators and often must postpone or forgo surgeries and other care, which only amplifies concerns about a health crisis or pandemic.

The blockade's widespread effects

MARIE DENNIS, co-president of Pax Christi International, recently visited a health facility in Gaza. "Treatment for women with breast cancer, for example, is very difficult," Dennis said. "At least until very recently, there were no facilities for radiation therapy, and access to chemotherapy drugs is unreliable or impossible. Mastectomy is often the only



option, even if in other parts of the world such radical surgery would not be necessary.”

The blockade of Gaza can have devastating effects on people in need of medical care. “Women with breast cancer who need treatment that is not available in Gaza,” Dennis said, “are often refused permits to enter Israel for treatment.”

Medical Aid for Palestinians supports a women’s health center in a refugee camp in Gaza. The center provides a number of services to women, including physiotherapy, reproductive health care, psychosocial support, and health education. In 2016, breast cancer surgeon and U.K. Member of Parliament Dr. Philippa Whitford visited the center and spoke with a group of 17 breast cancer survivors who talked about their treatment and recovery and the obstacles they faced. The women had undergone mastectomies, and many of them were in need of further surgery, but the blockade restricts the ability of patients to leave Gaza for treatment. In addition, Gazan physicians are often prevented from traveling abroad to learn new techniques. Only patients with the most severe illnesses are approved to leave Gaza to seek medical treatment. Approval rates reached a low of 44 percent last October, according to the World Health Organization, compared to 93 percent in 2012.

The public health results are stark: Palestinians live 10 years less than do Israelis, according to Physicians for Human Rights, while the infant mortality rate is five times higher and the mortality of women at childbirth is four times as high.

The lack of stable and sufficient resources affects other aspects of Gaza’s infrastructure. Public transportation is unreliable, and schools, universities, and hospitals cannot operate with full functionality. Internet and cell phone usage is limited. Household appliances become inoperable,

including air conditioning in the summer and heat in the winter.

Industrial and agricultural sectors are also affected, reducing access to fresh food because crops often cannot be properly irrigated. And these challenges don’t begin to address the reverberating effects on civilians that still exist as a result of earlier wars in Gaza.

‘The people of Gaza cannot be forgotten’

WHILE THE humanitarian crisis has drawn worldwide response, progress in Gaza is stalled. In April 2016, the U.N. reported, 75,000 Gazans were still displaced after the 2014 war. More than 550 Palestinian children (and one Israeli child) were killed as a result of the war, and of the more than 3,000 who were injured, many continue to experience debilitating effects.

Humanitarian organizations have tried to address these problems, but the work is increasingly difficult as financial support is scarce. In addition, investors do not want to reinvest in Gaza when there is such a high probability it will be destroyed again in the near future.

Corcoran, head of American Near East Refugee Aid, argues that the people of Gaza and their grave challenges “cannot be forgotten; as Gazans definitely feel forgotten.” Along with its other work, ANERA seeks to provide a better future for Palestinian youth. The organization recently constructed a preschool in Gaza and is working to restore centers for autism and early childhood development that were bombed in 2014. Corcoran considers early childhood development to be crucial, since the education system is shattered; with so few classrooms

Above: Palestinians wait to pass through the Erez Crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel. Damage to the crossing terminal caused by winter storms in 2013 led to long delays as Israeli officials failed to establish alternatives to process Palestinians permitted to enter Israel from Gaza.



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left, schools often host double or triple sessions to provide room for children. On top of this, children who are only 8 years old have already lived through three wars, and many are burdened with severe psychological damage from the violence.

“Imagine a child getting three to four hours of education a day and that’s it,” Corcoran laments. “It’s just not going to work.” However, thanks to the focus on early childhood development, rebuilding schools, and renovating training techniques, not only are children provided with education, they also find safe spaces and normalcy in a time with very little stability or predictability.

‘Don’t ask me about hope’ DURING the drive back to the Erez checkpoint at the end of my visit, I talked with my host, Amir (a pseudonym used for security reasons), about his work and his family. I praised his efforts and affirmed his work responding to the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza and seeking to build peace.

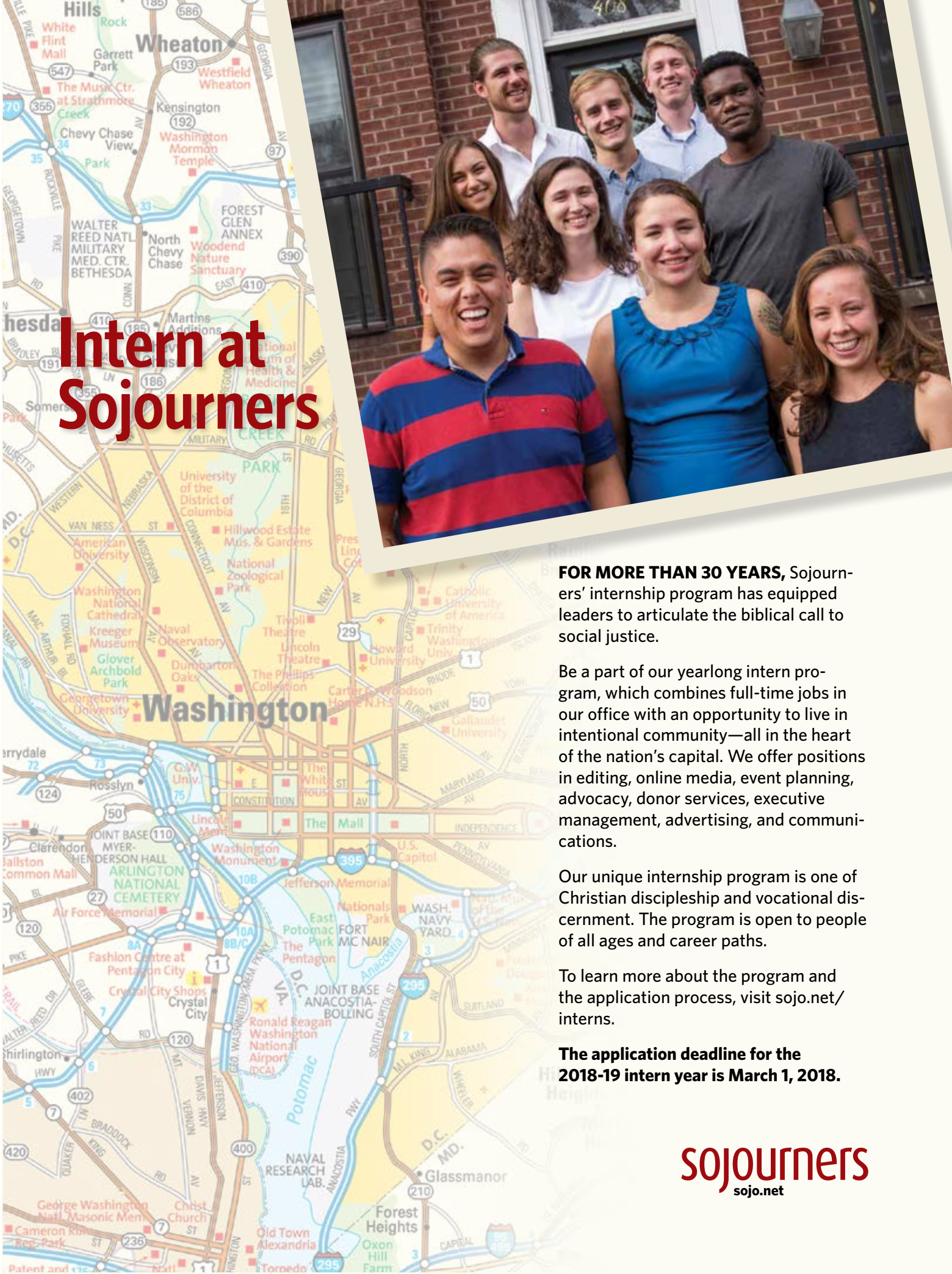
Amir is well-educated, and he looks at the geopolitical conflict through a pragmatic lens. He is someone who solves problems and seeks solutions, even when it seems there is little hope for compromise and effective resolution.

I asked him where he sees hope. There was a long pause. I could feel the tension in the car as we drove together toward the checkpoint. I would be able to leave; but he must remain.

Amir looked at me. “Don’t ask me that question,” he said. “We don’t like that question. When I look at the mothers and fathers of the Syrian refugees, and when I see the men, women, and children who climb on those boats to try to escape, I wonder if I am doing enough to ensure a future for my children. Perhaps it would be better to die like one of those Syrian refugees than to raise my children here without hope for a future.”

There is nothing that can be said to respond adequately to Amir’s dilemma. The only response is to continue to lift up the voices and stories of people like Amir, people who are diligently working toward peace, and let them know that they are not forgotten. In that, they may find hope. ■

Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, editor of A Land Full of God: Christian Perspectives on the Holy Land (Wipf & Stock, 2017), is executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP). Opinions in this article are her own. Jessica Hill is a research intern for CMEP.



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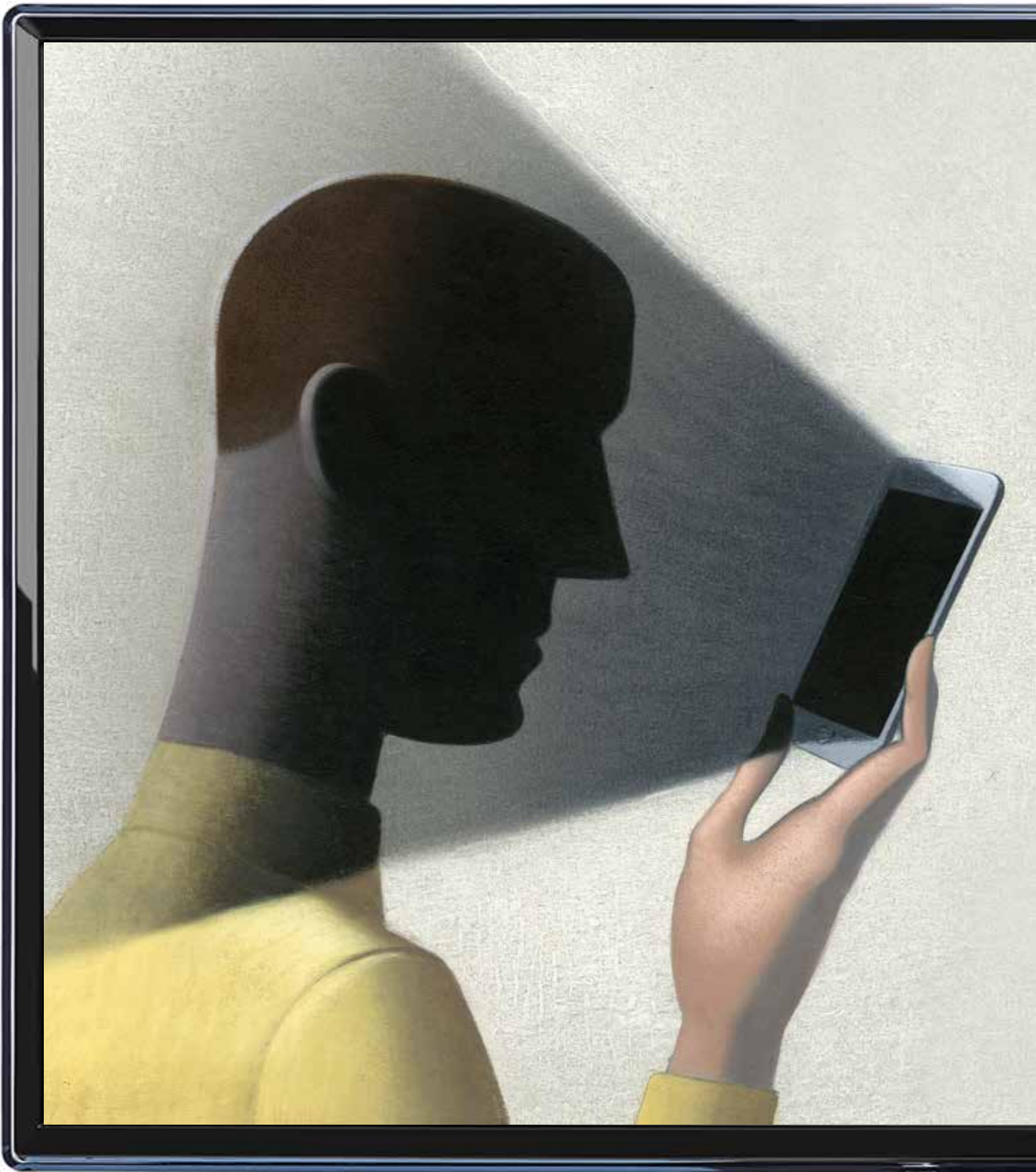
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Things We Can't Unsee

How do journalists—and the rest of us—keep from becoming numb in the face of online violence and tragedy?

by CATHERINE WOODIWISS • *illustration by* JON KRAUSE

IF THERE IS ONE CONFESSION a journalist never wants to make, it's that she can't handle the truth. Many of us got into the business for the express purpose of truth-telling, and for journalists growing up in the post-9/11 dawn of the 24-hour news cycle and the war in Iraq, the challenge to tell it boldly and well is our guiding star.

The nights are awfully cloudy these days.

When Syrian refugee children washed ashore in Libya in 2015, the images were indelible in their lonely, awful stillness—our decade's “vulture and the little girl,” our “Falling Man.” Editorial rooms around the country debated whether splashing images of drowned babies across our platforms was truly in the public interest. Can pressing on exposed nerves yield anything but a howl?

Many outlets—including Sojourners—decided against publishing the photos. Everyone saw them on social media anyway.

“I had a 2-year-old,” said Amy Sullivan, former senior editor for Yahoo! News and *Time*. “I had to be on Twitter, but I couldn't be on Twitter. I couldn't look at the photo out of the corner of my eye without seeing my son's body there.”

The world hurts everywhere, including in our social media feeds.



Decision fatigue has become a staple: There are simply

Wading into digital battlefields

It hasn't gotten easier for those of us on social media—which, these days, is most of us. After an 18-month series of ISIS beheadings and police shootings, the hot summer of 2016 brought Philando Castile's death, broadcast by his girlfriend on Facebook Live, and videos of young black Americans being pushed, shoved, and punched at campaign rallies. As reporters and editors parsed through a meteor shower of fake news, they found themselves dealing with a presidential campaign that openly dismissed eyewitness accounts of journalist harassment and intimidation. To many journalists, particularly women, religious minorities, and journalists of color, the election season gave rise to increasingly vicious anti-media imagery and abuse.

In this atmosphere, decision fatigue has become a staple: There are simply too many distressing stories to cover. And how to choose which stories matter unless you watch? In the dusk of 2016, self-care was a matter of holding one's breath until the brightest burning tragedy had passed.

Then Trump won.

When Sullivan left her job at Yahoo! in early 2017, she heard something new from colleagues: jealousy. "A lot of people told me,

"You have no idea how many times I think about this every day, just—leaving," Sullivan said. "I'd never heard people say that in journalism before."

In the last several months, I've begun to hear it, too. To be an online journalist in the United States right now is to live on the front lines of a social newsfeed in twilight, wading into digital battlefields of traumatic images and hurtful words hurled across our screens. Like those living and working in conflict zones, we are facing repeated exposure to violence—and are required to engage it, prioritizing which images to fact check and share and which to try to ignore. For religion journalists, the stories of faith and belief are elevated enough to command passionate readership and communal enough to wade into each injustice. Yet despite this—or maybe because of it—many "God beat" reporters sense that this is exactly the kind of moment for which our work is required. Because if religion journalists can't bear to continue looking clear-eyed at the truth, who will?

Tragedy goes viral

The first time justice and human rights reporter Bruce Shapiro received footage of a fellow journalist's death, he watched it. The journalist was Daniel Pearl, beheaded by

Pakistani terrorists. Later, Shapiro found the images stayed with him in a way he found "really, really intrusive." Unbeknownst to him, Shapiro, now the executive director of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, was experiencing early tremors of what social media editors, digital journalists, and 24-hour newscasters now know as part of their daily work: an infinite loop of disturbing stories and images.

Shortly after 9/11, psychologists introduced data suggesting frontline war journalists were at increased risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder. Proximity to physical danger was a reasonable and understood predictor of threat perception. But in 2013, a study out of UCLA on the lasting effects of trauma after the Boston Marathon bombing uncovered something striking: People engaged with six or more hours of media exposure in the week following the marathon were nine times more likely to report high acute stress—more than those present at the bombing themselves.

There is currently no medical consensus that online exposure to tragedy can directly cause PTSD. But in 2014, a study of "frequent and prolonged exposure to deeply disturbing images" published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* found

Tips for Digital Self-Care

WITH NEARLY 7 in 10 Americans using some form of social media, journalists aren't the only ones wrestling with the images and videos that flood their newsfeeds without warning. Here's what to do next time you find yourself confronted with traumatic content online.

Hit "pause." Don't view traumatic material without a procedure in mind. Take a moment to stare out a window or at an indoor plant. This disrupts the tendency to cruise-ahead on autopilot.

Ask: Do I need to see this? If you know this material is old or is of no real relevance to your objectives, it is best not to engage.

Ask: Do I need to see this now? It is best not to view violent material when you are tired. If you decide to continue viewing ...

Make the viewing window on your computer smaller. This disrupts the narrative flow of the material and builds in distance.

Steel yourself. Put on imaginary protective clothing of some kind, such as a raincoat, or visualize that bulletproof glass exists between oneself and the screen—techniques used by forensic investigators.

Lower the sound, or turn it off altogether. Sound is often the most affecting part of a video. You can always turn it back on later if you need to.

Scrub through. Drag your cursor through the timeline to locate aversive sections. If you don't need to look at those parts in detail, don't.

Adapted from the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma

too many distressing stories to cover.

that the frequency with which a journalist watches violent content correlates with the journalist's likelihood of having anxiety, depression, PTSD, or alcoholism. Nearly half of the journalists in the study reported at least weekly exposure to violent images.

In both studies, skyrocketing rates of anxiety and depression were prompted by a sense of collective trauma. The advent of "user-generated content"—tweets and live video streaming, shared to the world in real time—has enabled violent and graphic content to spread directly from the scene to mass audiences, often with no content warning or curation. The world hurts everywhere, including in our social media feeds.

"The pace of change means all journalists need to process graphic imagery and user-generated content," Shapiro said. "More people are doing it more often, and it's touching more hands. Anecdotally, I'm hearing a lot more distress."

"I couldn't write at all"

The season of Lent has become a popular time for U.S. Christians to take "social media fasts," to get away from anger and tragedy, as a form of self- and soul-care. But for Christians who are journalists, that isn't an option. "There's a crisis in journalism right now—people not having the space to care for themselves and to think through what they do in terms of vocation," Sullivan said.

"Over the summer, this [tension] was coming to a head [for me]—after the election, the balance I'd been trying to walk just fell apart," she said. "I was assigned the obvious question, 'What happened with white evangelicals?' I couldn't write at all. It grieved me as a person of faith, as much as it interested me. I needed to figure out what happened so I could *do* something about it, not so I could describe it." After 15 years in journalism, Sullivan said she's now working on a book and is discerning how best to focus on these questions. She's not alone.

"We talk about this all the time," said Daniel Burke, CNN's religion editor. Burke said frequent conversations with other journalists on the religion beat—especially those, like himself, raising young children—has helped him process the online load.

Engaging with online trauma has one very different element than experiencing a scenario in real time: Watching from a

distance gives us no agency to intervene. The effect is psychologically, and physically, disempowering.

Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk, psychologist and founder of the Trauma Center at the Justice Resource Institute, studies the effects of PTSD on the body and warns we too often neglect the physical dimensions of mental health. "Western culture is astoundingly disembodied," Van Der Kolk told *On Being* host Krista Tippett. Trauma is body memory. Your body has been "reset to interpret the world as a terrifying place, and yourself as being unsafe," Van Der Kolk explained.

To Van Der Kolk, sensory engagement with spirit and mind is a necessary discharge for trauma and perception of threat—something many in the media don't get in their work.

"Right after the election—this is a crazy thing for a journalist—I just did not watch or look at the news for a good two or three weeks," said Dawn Araujo-Hawkins, staff writer for the Global Sisters Report. "The divisiveness of the general culture—I couldn't deal with it 24 hours a day."

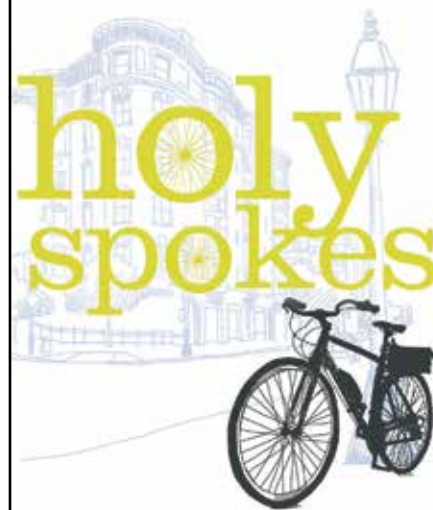
For women journalists, Jewish or Muslim journalists, and journalists of color, seeing traumatic images is not just a risk—it's increasingly a likelihood.

Aysha Khan, social media editor for Religion News Service, says she's been sent photos of people with their head cut off and images of pigs. The hateful images are attempts to intimidate Khan, a Muslim woman. "It's very hard to avoid things you don't want to deal with," Khan said. "As social media person, you have to read everything."

Even on the religion beat, characterized by a friendly camaraderie, journalists are feeling the beleaguering effects of sustained work in a hostile time. "I think I'm definitely more nervous," said Araujo-Hawkins. "Access [to journalists] is so much easier, and comments are so much nastier, that you do worry—you publish something and think, 'What's going to happen, do I actually need to be afraid?'"

Like Sullivan and Burke, Araujo-Hawkins says reporting objectively on trauma and stories of abuse was on her mind long before the election. But despite her new anxiety, she has no plans to stop. "Being objective means something different in an age when there's so much hatred toward certain groups of people," she said. "I think about that all the time

LAURA EVERETT



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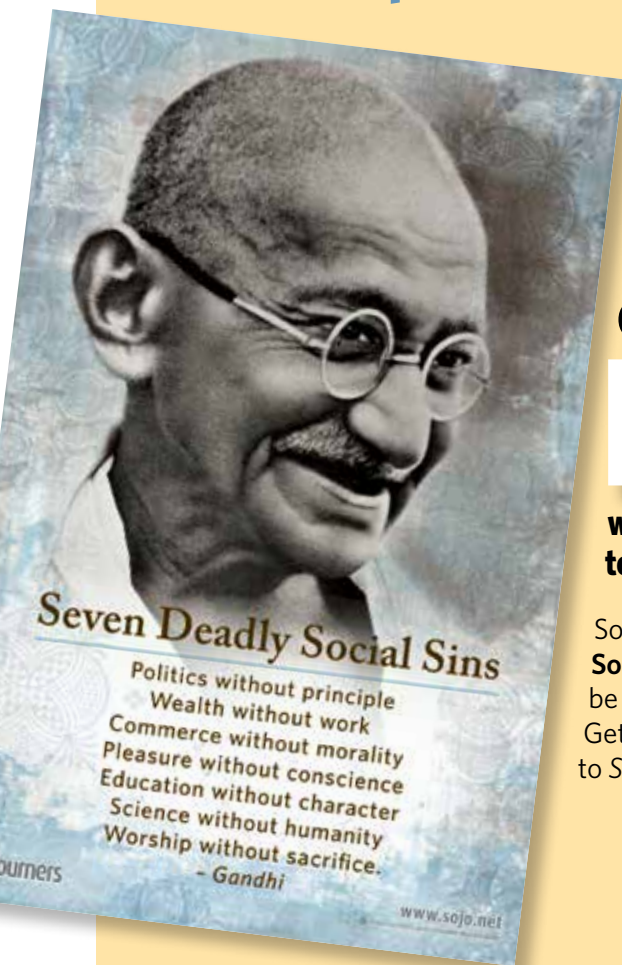


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when we're talking about Muslims or ISIS—they're not the same thing, and there are so many people who want them to be the same thing, and you have to parse that out, every single time. You have to do more to support the truth. It is my moral responsibility, and my professional responsibility, to report on race issues, on gender issues. I go out of my way to do it now."

Our own devices

Publications are beginning to address the effects of sustained engagement with violent and traumatic images. Burke said CNN has offered counseling in the past. And Shapiro's work with the Dart Center includes training major news publications to deal with traumatic news and images.

But in the meantime, it's still largely up to individual journalists to address their own self-care. For Sullivan, being in the steady presence of her church congregation on Sundays has been integral for embodied connection. And while she's stepping back from her top editorial role for now, she's keeping in touch with her journalism peers. "I find my religion and politics colleagues very nourishing. I wouldn't want to log off completely," she said.

Burke said he frequently reads short-story writer and essayist George Saunders—a kind chronicler of surreal worlds not too far from our own. "Also, I get sick all the time," he says. For Khan, it's personal advocacy. "What I do find fulfilling is to make the donations to groups I feel are doing things I believe in and advocate for causes that I personally believe in ... [and] spending time at activist circles that [I] find necessary, not as a journalist but as a person who is affected by the same policies, the same legislation."

In the course of reporting this story, journalists unfailingly expressed concern for the well-being of other colleagues and friends in the media. The instinct reveals deep kindness, but also an undeniable sense of isolation: Each of us on our personal devices, viewing awful things, worried others are taking it worse. I wonder whether in acknowledging the pain of others we're also eschewing the trauma of our own experience, to prove we can still muscle up in our own lives. It's worth asking: at what cost?

"Religion asks us: What are our obligations to people who are suffering?" Burke said. "And emotions tell us something—we should care about those people." ■

Catherine Woodiwiss is Sojourners' senior associate web editor.

The Lady on Short Columbia Street

I saw her in the month of mumps
puffed up in poverty's robes,

a woman of fragments,

a shuffling quilt with running threads—
more holes, really, than skein.

You could read history in the headlines
she wore, partial untruths, incomplete

fictions. All of her lovers
failed to match the shoes she put on.

Every child she birthed missed having
national sunshine and two names.

She dodged taxes on her home;
it never had an address to speak of and

moved like wind-spinning, clanking aluminum cans
she chased for pennies.

Her boudoir looked like a butcher's sleeve;
stolen ketchup packets from McDonald's
provided ambergris for her perfume.

She was disqualified for any entitlements
except for open dumpsters on eyeless streets.

But mail always waited for her
no postage due; she was the patron

of the discarded; on winter nights the USPS
coated her from the leprous jaws of the wind.

She slept at the homes of three different zip codes
one January; always leaving at dawn's early light;

she thought the flag needed to be washed.



Philip C. Kolin, editor of Southern Quarterly, is a professor emeritus at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. He has published eight collections of poetry, including Emmett Till in Different States and Benedict's Daughter. With gratitude for Malaika Favorite's artwork "The Flag Needs A Washing" (malaikafavorite.artspan.com).



By Robert Hirschfield

Fighting Back with **Style**

She survived an attack with acid. Her revenge? Working against gender violence.

"I JUST TURNED 19 that April, the age a girl blossoms. I was attractive. I was a fashion student in Delhi. Two months later, driving my car in Lucknow, just like that, I was cooked, *finished!*"

Now 30, Monica Singh, throws back her head, with its reconstructed face, the product of 46 painful operations, and laughs with real gusto at this unseemly cosmic joke. I find myself, uneasily, laughing with her.

We are sitting in Gregory's Coffee near Times Square in New York City. It is a January evening. The café is nearly empty, and the overhead lighting seems to be struggling to push back the darkness pressing in against the window. Singh is unfazed by this Hopperesque tableau.

In the weeks after her spurned suitor hired men to pour a bucket of acid over her, she was confined to a cage-like cubicle to protect her from infectious contact. "It was like being in a coffin," she said. "People were looking at me from a distance. I felt like an animal in the zoo. But in my mind, I was already walking, going back to school, imagining that I didn't open my car door to the men on the bicycle, that I didn't leave the house that day."

Sixty-five percent of her body was burned. It was a year before she could walk again (even being able to move her little finger was a big adventure), eight or nine years before her final operation.

Before meeting me, Singh was busy doing her night job, her activist job, running the Mahendra Singh Foundation to aid women victimized by gender violence. By day, she is

Katie Booth/Women in the World

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story," Singh says. "The guys were stalking. They got rejected. They took revenge. I was luckier than the other girls. They were mainly from lower class or lower middle-class families. My father [for whom her foundation is named] went through his savings and had to sell many of his possessions to have my medical expenses taken care of."

Recalling my many visits to India, my many conversations with Indians about suffering and survival, and how even the

"I see the entire world as being full of survivors."

moderately religious spoke of turning in extremis to God, I ask Singh about her own spiritual scaffolding during recovery.

The question seems to surprise her. She's already told me that Indian millennials like herself do not fall into the traditional Indian box. They are busy building their own, yet unnamed box.

"I believe there is a positive energy in the universe that listens to your thoughts, that hears your words. I read the Gita, the Bible, the Quran. As for God, you know who was my God then? My father was my God. My doctors were my God."

I float the lead balloon of forgiveness. Singh makes a face.

"I am not Mother Teresa! I am not concerned with forgiving my attackers, but I do want them to live, I don't want them to die. I want them to understand what they did, to regret what they did. The man who organized the attack went to my father and asked if he could marry me. That's how delusional he was."

Fighting back with comic books

After losing the face she was born with, Singh became one of India's best-known faces of gender violence. (She has been named a U.N. Women Global Youth Champion dealing with gender violence.) In Delhi, she says, people recognize her in the street, greet her, stop to chat with her.

In the land of Bollywood celebrities, a celebrity survivor. "What do they say?" I ask.

"They usually say how much they admire my strength, how much they would like to have my strength. Especially the girls I

Continued on Page 43

Acid attack survivor Monica Singh, after 46 reconstructive surgeries, is now a fashion designer in Manhattan.

a Manhattan fashion designer.

I have heard her say, "What happened to me taught me that beauty doesn't last long. Don't drool over it. One way or the other, it will go." So I ask, "Why fashion?"

"Fashion is the oxygen I inhale every day," she says with a rush of joy.

She is perfectly at home with contradiction. Even what is ephemeral needs its poetic definition, its veil of imagination.

The same story, multiplied

Singh would clearly prefer being asked about fashion than interrogated about her ordeal. "People are always asking me about what happened that day, and how and why, but I am not the only one who suffered like this." There are around 1,500 attacks reported worldwide each year; since many attacks aren't reported for fear of reprisals, the real number is likely much higher. Singh pegs the annual figure in India alone as between 1,000 and 1,500.

"Everyone has more or less the same

New & Noteworthy



SILVER SOUL

Memphis-born Don Bryant, who is 74 but sounds decades younger, has made a throwback-yet-fresh soul album, *Don't Give Up On Love*. Along with the standout, gospel-fired "How Do I Get There?" are exuberant grooves and smooth ballads on more earthly themes. Fat Possum Records

MUTUAL RESPECT

Evangelical-rooted professors Marion H. Larson and Sara L.H. Shady believe interfaith dialogue is vital—and doesn't demand watered-down faith. In *From Bubble to Bridge: Educating Christians for a Multifaith World*, they offer Christians the perspective and tools to build bridges. IVP Academic

EVERY DAY HOLY

Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home, by Traci Smith, offers 50 do-it-yourself ideas to incorporate spiritual practice into the bustle and hum of families with children. Includes activities suitable for different age levels (including the child at heart). Chalice Press

WRITE ME A LETTER

Shortly after the 2016 U.S. election, novelist Carolina De Robertis invited writers and activists to explore themes of hope in epistolary essays. The result is *Radical Hope: Letters of Love and Dissent in Dangerous Times*, with Junot Diaz, Alicia Garza, Jane Smiley, Jeff Chang, Celeste Ng, Hari Kunzru, and others. Vintage

Strange and Beautiful *Psalms*

AT THIS POINT, it's almost a tradition that aging roots music icons find a third, fourth, or fifth act in partnership with some latter-day guru of cool. Think Rick Rubin and Johnny Cash, Jack White and Loretta Lynn, Joe Henry and almost everyone else.

But the latest such pairing is, on the surface at least, the most incongruous yet. Jessi Colter, a soulful country singer most famous for being the widow of Waylon Jennings, has made an album (*The Psalms*) with Lenny Kaye, the rock historian, producer, and guitarist most famous for his lifetime membership in the Patti Smith Group.

Unlike all those other musical odd couplings, this one is not cross-generational. Colter is only three years older than Kaye, but it was always a long way from CBGB to the

Jessi Colter and Lenny Kaye



Colter was at the piano, her Bible open before her, improvising melodies as she sang.

Grand Ole Opry. Yet here they are collaborating, on an album of Bible verses set to music no less. But when you look a little bit below the surface, this pairing makes all the sense in the world.

The origins of this album go all the way back to 1995, when Kaye, who has always kept up his career as a music journalist, was in Nashville helping Waylon Jennings write his autobiography. One morning, he walked into the living room and beheld Colter at the piano, her Bible open before her, laying down chords and improvising melodies as she sang from the King James Version of the Psalms. It was, Kaye has written, "one of the most beautiful expressions of belief I had ever witnessed."

Later, after Waylon's death in 2002, Kaye began nudging Colter

to record her psalms. Finally, in 2007, she was ready. In one session that year and two the next, they cut all the piano and vocal tracks, and some of Kaye's guitar, mostly in single takes. Then it was Kaye's turn to procrastinate, as he spent the next decade going to those tapes in odd moments, "decorating" them sparingly with a little organ here, some more guitar there, some drums and percussion, and even a smattering of harp.

Now we have it, and we can hear what Kaye heard 22 years ago, and why it works.

This kind of Spirit-driven performance might come naturally to Colter, whose mother was a Pentecostal preacher. Kaye's affinity for the material, he says, dates to his fascination with the minor-key Hebrew songs of the cantor in the synagogue of his youth. But what he does here is also very much like what he has done for the past 45 years with Patti Smith, building a musical infrastructure for the ecstatic utterances of a mystic poet. He's just traded Smith's improvised conflation of Van Morrison's "Gloria" with "Gloria in Excelsis Deo" for Colter's keyboard

channeling of King David's "Who is the king of glory?"

"Psalm 23," while recorded on the spot, was pre-written with contemporary classical composer Kenneth LaFave. But the other 11 of these psalms were completely improvised. And Kaye's decorations have done nothing to detract from that spontaneous expression. Some of Colter's improvised melodies do cohere into song structures. Some are more like the chanted psalms we Catholics are used to hearing on Sunday morning. But even those gain momentum and structure from the dynamics of Kaye's backing tracks.

Ultimately, what we hear on this strange and beautiful recording is still what Kaye heard when he walked in on Colter two decades ago: A woman at prayer. And her deep personal engagement with these ancient songs quietly draws the listener into the fundamental acts of gratitude and surrender that are at their heart. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



Continued from Page 41

speak to. They feel trapped in a box, in a box I opened for myself because I refuse to see myself as a victim. No one ever dared say to me, 'You have no life left.' I wouldn't tolerate that. Many girls in India feel they need permission to live their lives freely. I tell them, 'The hell with permission!' Everyone has it in them to free themselves. Some realize that earlier than others. Some realize that through others."

A great many attack victims are abandoned by their families as financial, social, unmarriageable liabilities. Singh says adamantly, "If your family doesn't need you, you don't need such a family." I recoil. Other survivors, I say, would not necessarily see it that way. She mulls that over. "Yes, my family experience is very different from theirs. My

"Everyone has more or less the same story," Singh says. "The guys were stalking. They got rejected. They took revenge."

family accepted me. Okay, maybe I am the wrong person to talk for those whose families rejected them."

But she is the right person to talk about the increasing resistance to India's old oppressive attitudes toward women. Her generation, she says, wants change in gender relations; the unprecedented numbers that turned out to protest the notorious bus rape and murder of Jyoti Singh in 2012 give a glimpse of what that might mean for India. (It is worth noting that India's 2011 census concluded that 701 million out of 1.2 billion Indians were under the age of 30; young people will help swell the work force to 64 percent of the total population by 2021.)

The Delhi bus atrocity led Indian-American filmmaker and writer Ram Devineni to enlist Singh's help in the series of breakthrough comic books he created. In the first book, *Priya's Shakti*, the protagonist, Priya, is gang raped. She is subsequently incarnated by the Hindu goddess Parvati and with her newly minted energy empowers other rape victims to demand justice and



Whoopi Goldberg in *The Color Purple*

TEMPORARY CATHEDRALS

I HAVE LOVED movies as long as I've loved anything, but these days I don't love going to the movies. Multiplexes often feel like overpriced and overstimulating factories, in which we pay to be bombarded by advertising for other products. Industrial movie houses are more like planes going through turbulence than spaces for paying attention to art or even merely the pleasure of being entertained. Not an escape, but an ordeal.

This shadow has, however, provoked alternatives. Life-giving ways to watch movies are popping up—new independent theaters, community screenings, and festivals that interrupt the conveyor-belt method of get 'em in, sell 'em stuff, and get 'em out.

The Movies and Meaning community recently planned an "embodied screening," where the gifts of a story could be allowed to breathe. We chose the film based on Alice Walker's novel **The Color Purple**, for its honest facing of human brokenness and invitation to soul repair. We hosted the screening at the 90-year-old KiMo theatre in Albuquerque, N.M., one of the true cathedrals of cinema. No flashing lights or obtrusive advertising, no overpriced concessions, just friendly faces and a space to ready yourself for the experience of dancing light and sound, fictional adventures, and real-life hope fictioning each other.

Walker introduced the screening with a delightful truth: The reason she wanted *The Color Purple* to be filmed

was so her mother could see "a good movie," one without gratuitous violence or superficial dialogue but also a movie in which she could see people like herself represented. The lights went down, the music began, the image of a field in Georgia revealed itself, and the story of Celie, one of the great characters in literature, unfolded: her suffering, her resilience, her rage, her losses, and ultimately her joy.

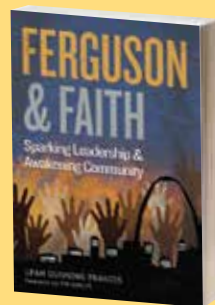
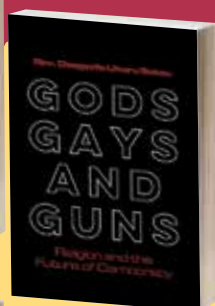
Afterward we invited the audience to a ritual of letting go, then received a blessing from our diverse community leaders—the West African elder Malidoma Somé, the Syrian-American Muslim poet and transformative activist Mona Haydar, and Walker herself. Then we danced, to a Motown playlist curated by Walker. It was a perfect evening, where lament was held lightly in a space where hope was ignited. We saw a story of human suffering and healing and built community through seeing our own sorrows and hopes mirrored in the faces around us.

This is what cinema is for. We can make such temporary cathedrals in our homes and community gathering spaces. It's a small act of resistance against the commodification of everything. All it takes to begin is to decide to do something different. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.

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change, marching with them from village to village, Gandhian style, to make their voices heard.

Priya's Shakti and its successor, *Priya's Mirror*, about acid attack survivors, were publishing sensations, read by hundreds of thousands of people in India and the West, mainly in downloads but also in print editions.

"That was a good way of getting the message out," Singh says. "The comic books reached young schoolgirls who were starting to be victimized by bullying, by rape. It reached young schoolboys too."

The power of survivors

Activist acid attack survivors occupy a wretchedly special place in the struggle against gender violence in India. Singh, though now a New Yorker, still manages to collaborate with groups such as Make Love Not Scars. The organization was founded by Ria Sharma, a young Indian woman. Like Singh, she studied fashion, at the Leeds College of Art in England. She decided to shoot a documentary on acid-attack victims in India and found herself becoming an activist. In 2014, Sharma established MLNS, which has raised money for medical and rehabilitation assistance, as well as vocational training, for survivors.

Singh's foundation, begun in 2015, is similar in its focus on medical and rehabilitation assistance. But its differences in scope and universality does not surprise me. Singh is a woman who pushes boundaries. When she saw gender violence in the homes of relatives, prior to the attack, she confronted uncles who abused aunts with hard questions and moral considerations. Some, she recalled, stunned and shamed by the intimate invader's effrontery, changed their ways. Others, of course, did not.

"We hope to register our foundation in Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as India. Right now, we provide counseling for acid attack survivors, but we plan to expand our services to include women who are survivors of rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence. We hear from women as far away as Russia and Germany. I see the entire world as being full of survivors." ■

Robert Hirschfield is a New York City-based freelance writer.



Reviewed by Julie Polter

THE PAST IS NEVER PAST

The Blood of Emmett Till, by Timothy B. Tyson. Simon & Schuster.

ON A HIGH PLATFORM in the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., sits a glass-topped casket. The museum's deputy director, Kinshasha Holman Conwill, has called it "one of our most sacred objects."

The casket once held the body of 14-year-old Emmett Till, an African-American boy from Chicago who, while visiting family in Mississippi in the summer of 1955, reportedly whistled at a white woman named Carolyn Bryant at a country store. A few nights later her husband and brother-in-law kidnapped Till, beating and murdering him before fastening a heavy industrial fan to his neck with wire and throwing the body into the Tallahatchie River. The local sheriff ordered Till's body to be buried the same day it was found. Instead, one of Till's great uncles intervened and made sure the body was returned to his mother in Chicago.

Mamie Till-Mobley allowed photographers from *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines to take pictures of Till's mutilated face and insisted on an open casket and public viewings. Tens of thousands filed by Till's broken body.

Till-Mobley's choices, historian and award-winning author Timothy B. Tyson

writes in his newest book, *The Blood of Emmett Till*, leveraged “the only influence America’s racial caste system granted her: public grief and moral outrage sufficient to shame and anger some fraction of the nation.” The funeral and the murderers’ acquittal a few weeks later produced outrage and resolve pivotal for the civil rights movement.

Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam confessed to the killing in a *Look* magazine article a few months later. And Carolyn Bryant, in a 2008 interview with Tyson, confessed that she’d lied under oath when she said during the trial that Till grabbed and propositioned her in a crude and threatening manner: “That part’s not true,” she told Tyson. Speaking on the record for the first time in more than 50 years, Carolyn Bryant said, “Nothing that boy did could ever justify what happened to him.”

The story then, and in its retelling, has often focused on the hapless Northern boy’s violation of the South’s “race-and-sex taboo” rather than on the life-and-death struggle for human rights that was the context for the killing and intrinsic to both the taboo and the murder. As Tyson writes, many of the accounts at the time, “from the virulently defensive accounts of Mississippi and its customs to the self-righteous screeds of Northern critics, noted that Till had been at the wrong place at the wrong time and made the wrong choices.”

To counter this, Tyson details the political context of the killing. The North too had abundant racism—the bombing of homes of black people who had moved into traditionally white neighborhoods in Chicago being just one example. In the South segregation and the domination of blacks by whites was formal, omnipresent, and secured in large part by terror and disenfranchisement. Black leaders in Mississippi, many of them World War II veterans who fought for freedom overseas only to suffer abuse and limited rights in both the military and back home, began to build networks of activists in the late 1940s. They boycotted white service stations until the

stations provided restrooms for people of color, held large annual rallies featuring nationally known black elected officials and celebrities, and tried to vote and register people to vote. White leaders devised new ways to block black people from voting, with economic reprisals and violence as reinforcement when quasi-legal maneuvers didn’t work. Tyson describes this as “slow trench warfare,” which continued through the early 1950s.

The battle heated up after the Supreme Court’s May 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that state laws establishing separate public schools

for black and white students were unconstitutional. By late July white leaders in Mississippi founded the first Citizens’ Council, which sought to defend segregation by any means necessary—economic pressure officially, but also “in considerably starker terms.” One black man who was registered to vote

“received an unsigned letter threatening, ‘Last warning. If you are tired of living, vote and die.’” Businessman, activist, and pastor Rev. George Lee of Belzoni, Miss., died from a shotgun blast from a car that followed his one night in May 1955.

And two weeks before Emmett Till was kidnapped, a black farmer, Lamar Smith, “went to the courthouse in Brookhaven, Mississippi, to obtain more of the absentee ballots he was distributing to African Americans so that they could vote without being intimidated or attacked.” At 10 a.m. on a Saturday, with dozens of people nearby, he was attacked on the courthouse lawn by three white men, beaten, and then shot in the heart at close range.

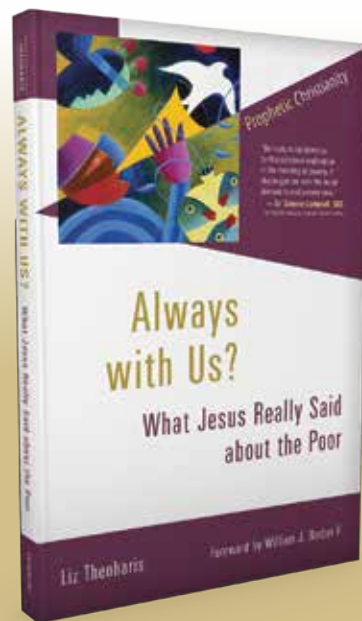
It was a terror campaign, a continuation of the 300-year battle to maintain white supremacy. And while Emmett Till was not a voting rights activist or sent to desegregate a school—he was, by all reports, just a fun-loving kid—he was nonetheless a casualty of a dirty war.

The contemporary echoes are chilling, whether in reports of black men and boys gunned down by police (Jordan Edwards the most recent as of this writing), political

Emmett Till’s mother leveraged “the only influence America’s racial caste system granted her: public grief and moral outrage.”

Always with Us?

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Liz Theoharis

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maneuvering on voter IDs and redistricting, or the 2013 Supreme Court ruling that weakened the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This book evokes the powerful undertows and riptides of history that confront us in the daily news in this era when white supremacists are senior White House advisers.

Emmett Till's casket is a reminder

of a mother's fierce courage in the worst moments of her life—a sacred stand against white terrorism. She asserted that her black son's life mattered and would not be disappeared. But it might also remind us: History is never just about the past. ■

Julie Polter is a senior associate editor of Sojourners.

Reviewed by Anne Colamosca

A MISMATCHED PAIR

Churchill and Orwell: The Fight for Freedom, by Thomas E. Ricks. Penguin Press.

THERE'S NO DOUBT that both Winston Churchill and George Orwell (two of the 20th century's harshest critics of the Soviet Union) would be fascinated by the gaggle of money launderers, KGB men, and other Vladimir Putin supplicants dominating today's international and domestic news.

Thomas E. Ricks, a national security adviser at the New America Foundation, has written a relatively compact dual biography of the two men, *Churchill and Orwell: The Fight for Freedom*. It is extremely readable, but it leaves out a lot. Ricks comments: "On the surface, the two men were quite different. ... But in crucial aspects they were kindred spirits ... [who] grappled with the same great questions—Hitler and fascism, Stalin and communism."

It's an intriguing thesis that in the end doesn't quite pan out. Ricks' narrow focus on these 20th century "isms" ignores a profound difference in attitudes by Churchill and Orwell, which in the end demonstrates a deep political chasm.

Orwell wrote extensively about poverty, Britain's debilitating class system, the deep wounds inflicted by imperialism, and powerful governments using deadly doublespeak. Though he was famously known for criticizing socialists, Orwell stated very clearly after the publication of *1984* that he was indeed a socialist, a political philosophy that Churchill detested, almost as much as he did communism.

Churchill, a bestselling war correspondent from his 20s to his mid-30s, worked as a newspaper journalist, military analyst, and high-ranking politician. His amazing military career—as soldier and prime minister

(leading Britain against the Nazis) endured over 50 years, from 1895 to 1945. Ricks is at his best in critiquing Churchill's brilliant moves and almost fatal missteps. As Ricks writes, "The political philosopher Isaiah Berlin observed that Churchill saw life as a pageant, with himself leading the parade." And it is this famously drawn "pageant" that clearly mesmerizes Ricks, who has worked as a war correspondent himself.

But Churchill's attitude and actions involving imperialism have been getting considerable scrutiny by scholars, especially over the last 15 years, and there is a growing body of work describing Churchill's words and actions—particularly in Britain's colonies—as arrogant and cruel. Even an old chestnut, recounted by biographer Martin Gilbert, reveals this state of mind: "It is alarming and also nauseating; Churchill told the West Essex Conservatives on Feb. 23, 'to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well-known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal palace while he is still organizing and conducting a campaign of civil disobedience.'"

Although Churchill was involved in creating some social reforms with the Liberal Party before World War I, he was also under constant attack in the 1920s for strike-breaking and using excessive police force, issues largely ignored by Ricks.

Ricks does not offer up anything original when profiling George Orwell, a disappointment for many diehard Orwell fans. In fact, Ricks' Orwell is altogether humorless, without charm, and wooden. And it is Orwell's much more imaginative and penetrating

lens, embedded in his deeply felt and diverse reporting over many years, that has captured today's zeitgeist—"deep states" involved in unending war, powerless workers yoked to huge police states. It is Orwell's ferocious sensibility—like no other—that informs *1984*, making it a best seller again in the wake of the election of Donald Trump.

Most high-profile people turn out to be very complex. Despite Churchill's heavy-handed imperialism, there is no taking away from his monumental contributions during World War II. There's no telling what would have happened to the Western world without Churchill. And Orwell communicated in such an obscure way toward the end of his life that some critics say he allowed himself to be claimed by the Right—which did not define his lifelong sensibility, by any means.

Ricks attempts, but doesn't succeed, to describe two brilliant men who never actually met and who profoundly altered the course of history in vastly different ways. ■

Anne Colamosca is a former staff writer at Business Week and has written for many national magazines and newspapers.

Reviewed by Olivia Whitener

WHEN PEOPLE ARE GOOD

"Come From Away," written by Irene Sankoff and David Hein; directed by Christopher Ashley.

WE ALL HAVE a story of where we were that September morning, when the crumbling skyline of New York City brought the country to a standstill. For people on thousands of airplanes in flight that morning, their stories began with emergency landings and sitting for hours on the tarmac in unexpected places after U.S. airspace closed. Of those stranded "plane people," 7,000 arrived in Gander, Newfoundland—an island town of about 10,000 locals and limited resources. The new Broadway musical *"Come From Away"* provides a snapshot of the rest of that story.

At a preview performance in February, the audience was on its feet for an ovation before the lights went down. For 100 minutes the musical allows the audience to pause and reflect on the events of Sept. 11.



A scene from
"Come From
Away"

Claude Elliott, the mayor of Gander (played in the show by Joel Hatch), introduced the 10th-anniversary commemoration of 9/11 in Gander by saying, "We honor what was lost. But we also commemorate what we found." To sit in the audience alongside New Yorkers with intimate connections to that day and tourists with their own reasons for being there was to pay tribute to those memories as part of a community of strangers.

The script sensitively honors the mourning, fear, and prejudice that shook the nation and the world on that day and those that followed. But the show is not merely a 9/11 musical. The best sides of humanity are showcased as the story unfolds: humor, trust, generosity, and relationship-building. A group of strangers arrive in darkness, only to be received with love and genuine hospitality by a quirky town that works for four days to make the "plane people" feel at home. The ensemble cast of 12 brings to life dozens of characters with complex problems and incredible hearts—a showcase of the diversity and tenacity of the human spirit.

The most poignant vignette comes in the middle of the show. As the "plane people" begin to settle in to their unexpected stay in Gander and the chaos begins to dissipate, the enormity of the event washes over the faces of the characters. And like many people when faced with a worldly mystery, they turn to God. A character played by Chad Kimball starts by reflecting on a hymn from childhood that, "for some reason, was in [his] head." And then he begins to sing the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, crooning, "Make me a channel of

How Canada welcomed the 9/11 "plane people."

your peace / Where there is hatred let me bring your love / Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord / And where there's doubt, true faith in You."

And then another voice echoes his, creating with sound a deep mimicking of the pain, confusion, and longing in their souls. Next, a Hebrew prayer from a Jewish traveler seeking to share his history, followed by Arabic sung by a Muslim man trying to find a safe place to worship surrounded by people afraid of him. The cacophony of languages and voices rising to God in the midst of pain brings the gravity of the situation into focus. But the hope they pray for is also vivid in the faith-filled tableau.

Soon the drums start up and we move from reflection to pent-up energy; the feeling of connection first evoked through multifaith prayer is transformed into a party. Community in all forms is at the center of this show, a refreshing alternative to current headlines.

In 2017, a year thus far marked by division, doubt, and manipulated confusion, playwrights Irene Sankoff and David Hein have carved out a safe space with a profound sense of welcome in a 100-year-old theater in the heart of Manhattan. Six days a week, from the first sung lyric to the upbeat musical postlude that ushers you out of the theater, *"Come From Away"* is a reminder that community is created through kindness, even during tragedy. ■

Olivia Whitener (@owhitener) is a former editorial assistant for Sojourners. The original Broadway cast recording of "Come From Away" (The Musical Company) is available.

Growth Can Take Generations

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS is measured in generational time. An emphasis on God's faithfulness across generations is, by necessity, also an emphasis on community. God speaks and acts for the benefit of those present and those to come. Even when singular figures are mentioned—a prophet, a monarch—the message affects and is passed to and through the people.

The law and prophets represent God's investment over time and bind together these readings. The law and prophets speak at moments in time but their messages are timeless. The gospel presents these truths embodied in the person of Jesus—and the epistles preach them passionately.

These lessons are read in the great expanse of liturgical time known as "ordinary" or as the season after Pentecost. This is a green season in the church (no matter what your grass looks like); that green symbolizes growth. This is a time for remembering the explosive growth of the early church and tending to our own growth as individuals and in community. Growth takes time. Our sacred stories make abundantly clear that the people of

God—individual exemplars and the community, nation, and church—grew into fidelity over time.

The shaping of character and growth of faith is a process. These texts are signposts along the way.

Wil Gafney is an associate professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas.



[JULY 2]

Faithful Listening

Jeremiah 28:5-9; Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42

IN AN UNLIKELY pairing, Jeremiah's proclamation about prophets who proclaim peace frames the slave language in the epistle. Jeremiah was responding to Hananiah's promise that the devastation the Babylonians wrought on Judah would be undone in two years—understandably compelling, and consistent with God's words of restoration through other prophets. Jeremiah's reminder that God *also* sent words of devastation presented the ancient hearer with a quandary. How to know which prophet spoke for God? We face the same difficulty with competing, often shouting, voices claiming divine authority today. Jeremiah's validation technique of waiting for the prophetic word to come true requires more time than we or his audience may want to commit.

His unsatisfying response is a reminder that it's not always possible to know who speaks for God in the moment, particularly in a crisis. Jeremiah's audience did not always accept his words as God's words. However, scripture is clear that God's faithfulness to us is not dependent on our ability to discern correctly who is speaking for God.

The epistle to the community in Rome speaks on God's behalf, but does so presuming slavery is normative, leaving it unchallenged. At the same time the epistle is consumed with the depth of human failings. It took time for the church to comprehend that it could not offer the welcome in the gospel and remain silent about or even participate in slavery. Its normative presence in our scriptures should alarm us or, at the very least, make us uncomfortable.

[JULY 9]

Mother, Monarch, Messiah?

Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 145:8-14; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

WITH WHOM should the reader identify in these lessons? The messianic monarch of Zechariah? The people in the psalm who respond to God's merciful and compassionate deeds with praise? The person tormented by the disjuncture between his actions and

desires in Romans? The gospel ("But to what will I compare this generation?") offers several possibilities: sulky children, enlightened infants, mutterers and grumblers, and those weighed down by heavy burdens. Then there is Jesus, calling the mutterers and grumblers sulky children while acknowledging God's revelation to mere babies and offering rest to the weary. The rest Jesus offers, when read with the description of God in Psalm 145, suggests the deep rest of small children in a lap or on a shoulder, especially when it is that of their mother.

The psalm speaks of a God who is gracious and loving to all these identities. *Rahum*, often translated "merciful" (verse 8) or "compassionate" (verse 9), is the deep love that springs from the womb; no more separable than the heart is from heartache. This core description of God—gracious, loving, slow to anger, faithful—is foundational in Judaism and is repeated throughout the scriptures (see Exodus 34:6, Numbers 14:18, and Nehemiah 9:17 for examples). This God offers freedom and hope to those in literal and metaphorical prisons as described in Zechariah. Mother loves all she has made and catches us when we fall or even tip over (see Psalm 145:14)! Paul may have lost sight of this God in his seeming obsession with his failings.

[JULY 16]

Creation's Scope

Isaiah 55:10-13; Psalm 65:1-13; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

GOD RESTORES. This is the hopeful promise of the poet in Isaiah 55. God secures God's promise to God's people with a divine word. This word is also one of comfort, specific to Judah's context after the sacking of Jerusalem. Contemporary readers bring many kinds of fracture to the text, seeking restoration from a multiplicity of devastations. The God of the psalmist who answers prayer—including prayers for restoration—is worthy of praise. This is the God who saves and delivers with the power of creation in hand.

These passages address the scope of creation—domesticated and wild and free. The earth is abundant, sufficient to feed her people (Psalm 65). Romans 8 examines the creation and re-creation of the inner person who "sets her mind on the things of the spirit"

(see verse 5). And Jesus uses an agricultural parable where good seed falls on disparate grounds, in which untamed and cultivated creation compete for the same space.

In all these readings, the passage of time makes clear God's works. In Isaiah, the regular turning of the seasons illustrates the reliability of God's word. In the psalm, the natural cycles of fertility in God-tilled lands recur faithfully, on schedule: God waters and thereby provides grain (verse 9). In the gospel, the time it takes to plant, and for crops to grow, fail, or thrive and be harvested, passes quickly. But the actual work of planting—agricultural seeds or the word of God—takes time to accomplish and for the fruit to be revealed.

[JULY 23]

Reading Slave Culture

Isaiah 44:6-8; Psalm 86:11-17;

Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

THE REIGN OF GOD is on full display in Isaiah 44, where God as sovereign contemptuously denies the existence of other gods. (This is somewhat at odds with other texts in which worship of other gods provokes divine jealousy, and Israel must choose whom it will worship.) What may look like two divine persons, "the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts" (verse 6), is an example of parallelism that characterizes biblical poetry. Both descriptions refer to God.

The language of sovereignty throughout the scriptures is hierarchal and dependent on androcentric and patriarchal social constructs, including slavery. In Psalm 86, the "serving girl" or "handmaid" (verse 16) can just as easily be translated as a "slavegirl." (The regular use of enslaved women and girls for non-consensual reproduction mitigates against calling them "servants.") Here, that language is a way for the psalmist to self-abase and indicate humility.

The psalm also offers nonhierarchal language for God, "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (verse 15). Reading "merciful" through its etymological root, the womb, these attributes open with maternal love and close with unbreakable faithful love.

Slave language undergirds both

testaments as a primary metaphor rooted in the lived experience of its intended audience. In the gospels, Jesus does not speak against the institution of slavery but rather uses its categories in his teaching. The farmer whose seed sprouts with weeds owns slaves who appear in the parable. As noted earlier, the use of language concerning slavery, and the practice of slavery in the scriptures, should always give us pause, particularly those of us in the Americas.

[JULY 30]

Many Voices

1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119:129-136;

Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

SOLOMON'S PRAYER in 1 Kings 3 reveals his "one-wish" theology: With the wide range of things he could have asked for, he chose wisdom in order to serve God's people. In so doing Solomon forgoes asking anything for his own benefit. There is something else beyond this traditional reading. This text paints a romantic, unrealistic portrait of David, who can only be said to have walked in "faithfulness" and "righteousness" before God (verse 6) if one ignores or normalizes his unprovoked slaughter of women and men (1 Samuel 27:8-12), his rape of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2-4), and his murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 11:14-24). This is a good place to be reminded that the Bible speaks with many voices, sometimes even about the same character or event.

If wisdom is the thread that binds these lessons, then each text offers a different perspective on wisdom. In Psalm 119, God's instructions represent wisdom. In Romans 8, God's Spirit, the fount of all wisdom, prays for us when we lack the wisdom to know how to do so ourselves. And in Matthew, Jesus displays pedagogical wisdom, demonstrating that there is no single image, language, or paradigm that can faithfully represent the realm of God. Jesus describes God's realm as transformation—seed to bush, yeast to bread—and discovering and sifting treasure.

In these texts is found a treasure (Matthew 13:52) that is both old and new. ■

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Justices Should Be Seen and Not Heard

SUPREME COURT Justice Samuel Alito recently gave a speech predicting challenging days ahead for people of the Christian faith, although he didn't seem too concerned about people of other faiths, you know, the godless ones. "It is up to all of us to evangelize our fellow Americans about the issue of religious freedom," he told a gathering of the *Advocati Christi*, a group of Catholic lawyers and judges which—and they will deny this—you just *know* is the secret society that chased Tom Hanks all over Rome in *The Da Vinci Code*. (They never caught him because he couldn't be late to the set of his next movie. Secret Vatican sects may be powerful and nefarious, but they're no match for Hollywood's more unforgiving God of Staying on Schedule.)

Alito was referring to the current "onslaught" against the freedom of



against people whose actions go against their personal beliefs. This might be useful to me if I ever open a business, because I strongly believe people shouldn't wear berets. They look ridiculous, and now I wouldn't have to serve them, right?

THERE ARE a couple of things wrong with what Justice Alito did:

1. *Supreme Court justices shouldn't give speeches.*

It brings their judicial objectivity into question, even if they are doing it on their own time and in their own clothes. I was surprised to see Justice Alito in a suit and tie, since I assumed that under his judicial robes he still wore the Catholic school-boy outfit he was warned never to remove for fear of going blind. Not to digress, but it's fun to imagine what other justices are wearing underneath. Setting aside for the moment the timeless question of boxers or briefs, does Clarence Thomas contrast his monk-like silence with a colorful Jimmy Buffett beach shirt under his robes? ("It's 5 o'clock somewhere. Which comports with what the founders intended.") Does Justice Ginsburg wear capris pants and Jimmy Choo mules? (It's a look she can easily pull off, hopefully through the next midterms.) And speaking of robes, does Neil Gorsuch's hang comfortably? I'm

just asking because it was intended for Merrick Garland, who was a much better fit. But back to my main point. (Remind me ... oh yes ...)

In Alito's speech before the *Advocati Christi* (anybody glancing around nervously when that name comes up?), he said, "We are likely to see pitched battles in courts and Congress, state legislatures and town halls, but the most important fight is for the hearts and minds of our fellow Americans." Which brings me to the second reason Justice Alito should stick to his chambers instead of telegraphing personal biases that could affect his deliberations:

2. *Supreme Court justices shouldn't give speeches.*

Okay, I guess I just have the one, but it bears repeating. If justices of our highest court want to have a persona outside the bench so be it. But instead of speaking to religious groups with suspicious-sounding names, why not do something less inflammatory and more in keeping with the dignity of the Court? Like maybe a car commercial.

If Justice Alito has a prejudicial preference for the great deals at Bob's Subaru, I got no problem with that. "Prices are so low it's almost *unconstitutional*! But I rule it's a SALE-ABRATON! So get on down to Bob's this weekend and be in a CLEAR MAJORITY of satisfied customers! Because I'm BRINGING DOWN THE GAVEL on high prices!"

Now that's a ruling we can ALL agree on.

(I can't believe I said that last part.) ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Judge not, unless there's a sale.

American Christians to practice *bigotry* and *discrimination* (italics mine; actually, so are the words), such as refusing to do business with gay people or provide comprehensive health care to women. As you may recall, giving employees access to contraception offended the Christian owners of Hobby Lobby, one of the nation's largest purveyors of arts and craft items—mainly high-end pipe cleaners and crepe paper that the Dollar Store doesn't carry. (I've never shopped at Hobby Lobby, although I'm a frequent patron of the Dollar Store, mainly for food items past their freshness date. But with Twinkies it doesn't matter.)

A sympathetic Supreme Court heard the cries of Hobby Lobby's owners and basically ruled it was okay for business to discriminate

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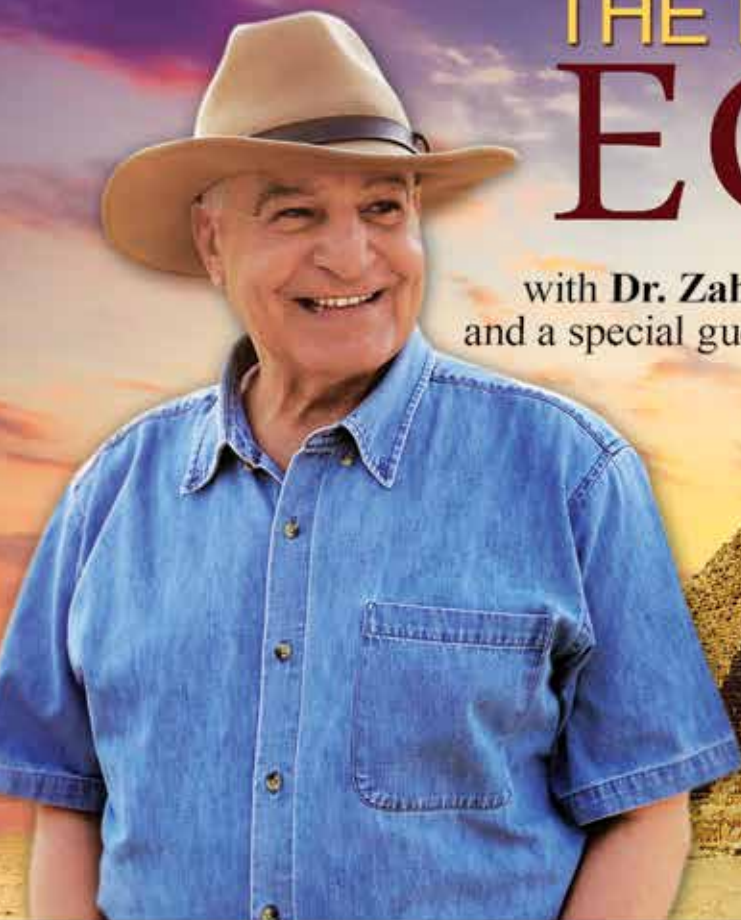
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